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THE AUTHORS' HAND-BOOK SERIES

THE PLOT OF THE SHORT STORY

AN EXHAUSTIVE STUDY, BOTH SYNTHETICAL AND ANALYTICAL, WITH COPIOUS EXAMPLES MAKING THE WORK

A PRACTICAL TREATISE
(Revised to include a Syllabus for Teachers)

BY

HENRY ALBERT PHILLIPS

FORMERLY ASSOCIATE EDITOR OF THE METROPOLITAN MAGAZINE

Author of "Art in Short Story Narration," "The Photo Drama," "The Universal Plot Catalog," "The Feature Photo Play," etc.

INTRODUCTION BY

MATTHEW WHITE, JR.

EDITOR OF THE ARGOSY

Third Edition

THE HOME CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOL
SPRINGFIELD, MASS.

808.3
P559p

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THE HOME CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOL

TO

MY WIFE

MY BEST CRITIC

I DEDICATE

THIS LITTLE VOLUME

ANOTHER VOLUME IN

THE AUTHORS' HAND-BOOK SERIES

The Art of Short Story Narration

BY

HENRY ALBERT PHILLIPS

Author of "A Complete Course in Short Story Writing." "The Plot of the Short Story," and formerly Associate Editor Metropolitan Magazine

INTRODUCTION BY REX BEACH

This is not a book for beginners any more than it is one for advanced writers. It is written with all serious students of the Short Story in mind. It is designed to meet a practical and every-day need.

Every page contains its boon of inspiration and helpfulness that will save every writer time, and enable him to do better work and command a better return for it.

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INTRODUCTION

FROM my point of view, surprise is the prime factor of the model, marketable short story—at least for American consumption. In England, editors appear to believe that their readers like to forecast outcomes in fiction, and find that they have proved themselves true prophets. Not so with our magazine purchasers. They demand the twist, the unsuspected trend to the story which shall keep them on the alert, and guessing, to the very end. And yet, the perfection in plot building of this sort, if you ask me for a sample, is supplied by England itself, in a story by one of its master minds in fiction. That it is a long novel, and not a short story, does not alter its value for my present purpose.

The story to which I have referred, with the model surprise plot, is Dickens's "Great Expectations." Pip has a fortune left him which he has every reason to believe—as has the reader—comes to him from Miss Havisham, whose peculiarities are set forth with sufficient distinctness to make the mystery sur-

rounding the bestowment of the money lead our thoughts in her direction. The revelation, that the money is remitted to Pip by a convict, whom, when a boy, he had helped to escape and long since forgotten, gives the story a twist and a thrill which, in my estimation, places it in the very forefront of plot building specimens.

But it is the art with which Dickens handled this skeleton, after he had thought it out, which lends the theme its supreme distinction. Both the convict thread and the Miss Havisham one are deftly introduced early in the story, but the last-named is so artfully assisted to intertwine itself over and about the former that we have practically forgotten all about the convict when he is sprung on us again with dramatic effectiveness. The germ of this plot was doubtless suggested to Dickens by the sight of some prisoner in juxtaposition with a small boy.

The things that do not happen, but which your active brain pushes along to a point where they could happen, are of far more use to the author than the most marvelous per-

sonal experience that could befall anyone, in my opinion. You are certain, then, of encountering no other claimants to the idea. Besides, you will exercise more care in making your story plausible.

You will pardon a reference to one of my own stories, but as three paragraphs of practical illustration are worth as many pages of abstract advice, and as I naturally know more about my own fashion of plot building than other people's, I may as well take an instance ready to my hand.

I wanted to write a story no longer than seven hundred words. I was returning from abroad and the first Sunday out I noticed at morning service in the cabin that the piano was played by one of the stewards instead of the young lady from among the passengers who is usually pressed into use. Before the hymn was half thru the people were singing one canticle while the steward was playing another. But the mischance soon righted itself, so doubtless no one noticed it but myself. However, I already had the outlines of my plot, and on Monday I wrote my story.

I started it by having my heroine reading in the dining room when the service began, quite unconscious that she was at church. Then she noted the mishap in the canticles, and happening to possess a strong contralto, soon set the others right by leading them for the moment with her voice. For this she received a grateful glance from the pianist. She could see only his eyes from where she sat.

The scene then shifts to later in the day when a fog arises, the ship runs ashore, the young woman, asleep, is rescued in the darkness by the pianist. The two are the only ones left aboard, and pass a fearful night. In the morning a boat puts out for them, and then for the first time the woman notices her companion's coat and understands who he is. And it was at this point in the story—after I had written some five hundred words—that I stuck for a bit.

"Look here," I said to myself, "if I carry this thing out to the obvious conclusion, the story will not only run much longer than I want it to do, but it will be frightfully conventional to explain how my hero was down

on his luck and had to take up with a steward's job to get back home. How then can I end the thing in short order and yet give it definite point?"

I thought over the problem for ten minutes and then the idea struck me. I would get in my surprise twist by keeping my hero just what he was when I saw him in the flesh —a real steward, and by making my heroine what I hadn't intended to have her at all—a lady's maid. And her frank statement of this fact formed the snapper to my story.

Thus, you see, I merely put two facts together—the steward at the piano and the mistake in the singing of the canticle—and let them work out their own salvation in the way of fiction.

To reduce my system to a formula I should say that I regard plot suggestion as infinitely superior to plot supply. In the one case you are giving your imagination a healthy chance to work; in the other you are merely taking over something ready-made which may not prove at all fitted to your system of manipulation.

MATTHEW WHITE, JR.

He buildeth best—who mixeth brains with mortar; who carveth his foundations after a pattern; and whose recompense is art—not gold alone.

FOREWORD

THE present work is the result of a demand made from time to time upon its author by many students of the Short Story. The writer hesitated before he took up even the minute study of his subject, which has occupied considerably more than a year. Previous to this, his services had been well calculated to enable him to glean an intimate knowledge of many phases of the proposed subject. He had served an arduous apprenticeship as a writer of fiction, having worked without any tangible results for more than a year, and at the end of several years having a score or more of published stories to his credit. Again, he had served three years as an editor, with two houses of widely different tastes for fiction. He learned that magazines had the hearts and the souls, the prides and the prejudices, of their respective editors and owners. "What

the public wants" did play a part in what the magazines published, but not nearly so large a part as what the advertising department did not want or what the man higher up had predecided to please himself over. Then, as a literary agent, he had picked up some rare bits of knowledge; observing that in many, many cases advertising and publicity on the part of the Author, and gaseous and magnetic salesmanship on the part of the Agent counted for infinitely more than good Fiction. And, lastly, as the author of a Correspondence Course in Short Story Writing, and as lecturer and instructor to hundreds of eager men and women desiring to enter the ranks of fiction writers, he had learned many valuable things. The gist of all this valuable information and knowledge may be boiled down to a few significant words in a single fact statement: The Public —as usual—is blamed for poor fiction and gets it; the Editors seek to gratify their personal æsthetic desires rather than meet the demands of a universal Art; the successful Authors can seldom tell why they succeed, and the would-be Writers of fiction are earnest in

nothing except the desire to get something for nothing. To all of which there seems to be but one way out: If artistic and perfect examples of fiction are not generally published the public cannot read them (the public wants what it can get), therefore the Author must learn how to produce artistic fiction, and so, at length will he compel the Editor to take it, just as sure as mind leads matter, and everybody will be better satisfied. The responsibility, and some measure of blame then, lies with the author, both advanced and as a tyro.

The present volume, and those to follow in the Authors' Handbook Series, endeavor merely to touch upon this profound and serious subject of the Modern Short Story, not so much with the idea of stemming the tide of careless endeavor, as of leading the way, in the hope that some of its great masters, both in exception and technique, may be moved to add their weight to a Reform that must result in an immediate betterment of a neglected Art.

HENRY ALBERT PHILLIPS.

July 20, 1912.

All these were hoary with age before the modern short story was born.

CHAPTER I

Misleading Forms of Narrative

ILLUMINATING COMPARISONS OF THE MODERN SHORT STORY WITH THE ANECDOTE; THE TRUE STORY; THE FABLE; THE ALLEGORY; THE CHARACTER SKETCH AND THE CHARACTER STUDY; THE HUMOROUS STORY; THE PLAYLET; THE NOVEL, AND THE NOVELETTE.

THE Modern Short Story is a *fragment;* yet it is a whole. Details are abhorrent to its very nature. It consists of a few master strokes, and a single figure stalking thru its length and breadth, in the shadow of which every other object and detail pales. Its power lies in the art of suggesting the unlimited panorama of the reader's imagination rather than in the science of photographing the writer's immediate vision.

Naturally, then, are we led to suppose that the Modern Short Story is far removed in

conception, construction and finish from the following short forms of fiction, which, alas, are often labeled with the name of short story.

We will not attempt to discuss the merits of any story form whatever, *per se,* excepting the Modern Short Story. Each of these forms that we may take up, admits of artistic treatment as well as the Short Story that will produce perfect gems, of its own class. We shall analyze, compare and contrast them for the purpose of showing what the Modern Short Story is *not.* And these illustrations are especially applicable, because of the fact that eight stories out of every ten, written by the inexperienced and untutored, belong under these other classifications.

The dictionary honors an *Anecdote* with the synonym of "short story." The neophyte in search of training in the art of short-story writing thru the pages of the dictionary, would naturally seize upon this enlightening bit of information and proceed to profit by it. But the Anecdote is really the relation of an actual experience of someone, either in the public eye or within the personal ken of the

listener, which depends for its point upon the humor in the situation, or in the character, or in the manner of the narrator. It is plotless.

In refutation of the possible charge that this is a Short Story, it is only necessary to say that a Modern Short Story without a plot cannot be. Furthermore, it is not a relation of fact, but the narration of fiction; actual personages must never appear in it, real people must always appear there. Humor may be incidental, but never the point.

Accompanying a large percentage of the manuscripts submitted for publication by novices, is the confidential assurance that every word of their story is *true*. This is most damaging testimony. Perhaps not one *True Story* in a hundred thousand is, verbatim, a true Short Story. And at this point, if anyone is kind enough to tell him, the beginner receives his first shock of disillusionment. For the construction of the Modern Short Story is intensely *artificial*, in the same sense that refined civilization is artificial when applied to a state of barbarism. Truth is so much stranger than fiction that the reading

public will not accept it except in the guise of *fact*.

A True Story then, is the relation of an actual happening or a series of them, that is supposed to bear resemblance to fiction because of its smack of adventure, of the unusual, of the weird or grotesque, of the startling, or of some other qualification that takes it out of the ordinary channels of normal life. But the Modern Short Story does not always aim to present the abnormal. In fact, that Short Story is greatest that can present in fiction form the most normal and commonplace happenings in the life of its characters. But it takes artistic treatment to do this. Material must be arranged with a view to effect, there must be a most careful exercise of the faculties of selection and elimination, there must be a plot.

Few need to be told that, while a *Fable* is fiction, it is not a Short Story. It was one of the earliest forms of shorter narration, and its function was to a point a moral. The ancient Fable employed animals as a means to carry its point. The modern Fable, as exemplified

in the work of George Ade, endeavors to influence our moral code thru our funny-bone. This form of didatic fiction has not become popular enough to warrant the expenditure of any writers' efforts, no matter how clever he may be in reeling them off, until he has first received a definite order to supply a particular publication with them. In this relation, the Modern Short Story may occasionally resort to personification, but the tale itself must be told unequivocally for the entertainment it gives, and not for the moral it contains.

Another form which has a decided moral tendency, yet which has more than once been successfully subjected to the laws and treatment of the Modern Short Story, is the *Allegory*. The usual Allegory, with its extended simile without the use of comparative words thruout the story, depending for its effect purely on its literary merits and affecting the æsthetic sense thru its figurative beauty, rather than the dramatic sense thru its perfect plot construction, is not a Modern Short Story.

Two other forms that are popular among advanced writers as well as beginners, and

still are not the Modern Short Story, are the *Character Sketch* and the *Character Study*. The latter often may be made into a Short Story.

The Character Sketch, in the very nature of it, cannot be a Short Story, for the character (hero) must remain perfectly still while he is being *sketched* by the literary artist. In other words, the hero is inactive, while the author is full of action. Of the Modern Short Story the very opposite is true.

The Character Study is too often something in the nature of a surgical operation on the character, who is compelled to lie perfectly still while his innermost and vital thoughts and feelings are laid bare with the scalpel of introspection. The Modern Short Story demands either portrayal or delineation of character thru the medium of action, progressive movement, or dialog. And, of course, there must be a plot.

One of the most common types, submitted under the label of "short story," is the *Humorous Story*. While the Modern Short Story may be infused with humor, yet its

effect upon the reader must depend once and for all upon the plot, and not upon humorous characters, humorous situations, humorous dialog or dialect, or upon the native humorous talent of the narrator. And, for that matter, we will find that the average Humorous Story degenerates into either a story of Nonsense, or into the Burlesque. In the former, the rule is "anything for a laugh"; in the latter some established, well-known or serious effort is held up to ridicule.

A *Playlet* is very often written and submitted for editorial consideration under the mistaken idea that it is a Short Story. And it is not necessary that this type of story should be accompanied with stage directions and actors' "business" in order to be called Drama. This untoward result is often produced when an author, sometimes in an honest attempt to write a Modern Short Story, overrefines his product. He seeks after the "unified and tremendous effect" towards which the perfect Short Story aims, and in his zeal loses sight of the fact, that only the Drama may (must) dispense with *every* least attempt at

elaboration. The Drama leaves all, except essential dialog, to other crafts. But the story writer must be his own scene painter, his own electrician and his own stage manager. His story must be played entire on the printed page and *visualized* in the heart and imagination of the reader. Whatever realism there can be must first be *told* and thus felt, heard and seen, thru the medium of artistic suggestion. A story written in play form is nothing but a play; and one composed of intense dialog only, denuded of description and introductions, and leaving characters and setting largely to the tender mercies of the reader's more or less prolific imgaination, is an unfinished story.

On the contrary, the Dramatic Story is one of the highest form of the Modern Short Story. But stress is laid, as we shall learn, not upon its dramatic form, but on its dramatic situation and effect.

At last we come to the final denomination of a short story, that may or may not be the Modern Short Story, under the classification of *Tale*. This term has been so loosely used

as to almost defy specific definition. "Any fiction story" is a Tale, as far as the present work is concerned. Each new writer of a technical book on story forms helps add to the confusion; one calling that which is contrary to the Modern Short Story a Tale, the other asserting that the Modern Short Story is a Tale. Irving's "Tales of a Traveler" and Kipling's "Tales from the Hills," argue in favor of making the definition cover the multitude of sins as well as the multitude of virtues.

So much for the shorter fiction forms. But the question is asked again and a again: "Wherein does the technique of the Short Story differ from that of the *Novel?*

The Novel aims to present an entire life-career, or that large section of it that depicts and terminates an interesting struggle, or delineates a prolonged evolution of one or more characters thru a series of crises, or chapters. Unity of time, place, person and viewpoint are observed only in the construction of each chapter. But the unity of theme alone is demanded of the Novel collectively. One chapter may deal with the doings of the hero, to-

day, in New York, told thru his musings with himself. The next chapter may take up an impersonal relation of the acts of the heroine, a year later, in Constantinople.

The Modern Short Story is, briefly, the depiction of the supreme and climacteric moment in the life-career of its single chief character, cumulatively led up to, and effectively disposed of.

The *Novelette* is just that—a little Novel. Some writers write very short Novelettes—let us say 10,000 words in length—and mislead themselves into thinking they have written long Short Stories. But the rule of the Modern Short Story applied to the Novelette will soon reveal its points of difference to the student.

The Modern Short Story is a genus
—not a species

CHAPTER II

The Modern Short Story

A COMPREHENSIVE DEFINITION; THE NAME A MISNOMER

INASMUCH as we have earnestly endeavored to learn, by comparison, what the Modern Short Story is not, it now behooves us to define comprehensively just what it is.

The *Modern Short Story* is a fiction narrative, short, not merely because it happens to be told in a few words, but by reason of deliberate method employed in its construction. Such a Story must have a well-defined plot that includes one complete action. It should set out to tell, not the history of an entire life-career, but the story of the *supreme moment,* or crisis, in a given life, or career. Its chief law is *compression.* There should be but one great event to record, which should be told as expeditiously as possible, eliminating all su-

perflous details, avoiding sub-plots. A single impression should be created in the mind of the reader, by having one character take the chief part in the single grand crisis of the story. Every word, every phrase, every incident, should bear direct relationship to the Climax. Economy, unity and compression should govern every element. The story should take place, *as nearly as possible,* within *one* period of time; there should be *one* character to whom all others are subordinated; the *one* progressive action should, if possible, be confined to *one* place; above all, there should be *one* grand Climax, or situation, toward which every element tends with rapid, clean strokes; and, finally, there should be but *one* tremendous impression left in the mind of the reader at the conclusion of the story.

That is the Modern Short Story, as we should recognize it, before looking into the most important element of technique that enables us to produce it—the plot.

Up to this point, one fact at least must have become self-evident to the reader of these pages: the term "short story" is a misnomer,

and accounts for many a misguided effort on the part of those aspiring to write the Modern Short Story. Any short written product whatsoever, that is composed of mingled fact and fancy, is to the untutored mind a Short Story.

And, too, a large percentage of our editors need to be educated in the art of the Short Story. At the very least, they should be urged not only to educate themselves in the technical lore of this product that furnishes such a large proportion of their literary provender, but also, to discourage the writers who do not study and practice their chosen art. The public we do not have to worry about. Their appreciation is founded, for the most part, upon the æsthetic appeal that any art makes upon them personally, and in this they are certain to be gratified in that most refined effective and pleasing product in all the field of Literature—the Modern Short Story.

Stories are born, not made. Of plots the very reverse is true—they are made to order.

CHAPTER III

The Plot

WHAT IT IS; ITS IMPORTANCE AND RELATIONSHIP IN THE MODERN SHORT STORY; THE OBSTACLE; LOGIC AND PLAUSIBILITY.

THERE are writers who will tell you that when they are ready to write a story, they just sit down and write it. A single character pops up in their minds, like a fairy prince, and bids them follow. Pen in hand, they scratch along after the magic guide, without the faintest idea where the next movement of the pen will bring them—and so on, to the end of the story. This is Romance, in a double sense, that is worth while avoiding.

Suffice it to say, the Modern Short Story admits of no such helter skelter treatment. There must be a preconceived plot. Furthermore, the short-story writer must, if possible,

foreshadow the end of his tale from his first word. How can he carry out this policy at all, if the events to follow even in the next paragraph, are unknown to him?

Not that the writer should disclose the denouement—that would be fatal to his power of holding the reader's interest within his grasp until the end of the story—but, his first word must have a cumulative value, which will be, subconsciously, born in the mind by the reader and shall contribute its share of gratification to him at the end of the story.

You may have an Anecdote, a Sketch, a True Story, or one of the many other short forms of fiction, that may be a gem, beyond criticism, of its kind. But you cannot have a Short Story that has not a plot.

The question arises, What is a plot? And it may be answered by various definitions:

The plot of a story is a cunning scheme devised by the writer, either to make the reader feel the reality of what he tells him, or to gratify his curiosity after having roused it.

The plot of the story is the "working plan" used by the building author. It is the support-

ing framework, which—after it has been clothed with the beautiful story exterior—is evident to none—except the creator of it. The plot is the penciled canvas necessary before the artist is ready to set about filling in with the color and the scene, the figures and the expression, that make the picture a complete work of art.

And yet the plot is something more than a mere outline of the work to be done. For in the plot there must be devised that winding up of suspense or interest that shall later affect the reader with a mental tension that is almost unendurable. Here is laid the plan to excite a curiosity that may be keyed to the breaking point. Preparations are made that these steps may begin with the first word of narration and climb steadily upward, or zigzag exasperatingly backward and forward, until the Climax is reached. These are some of the functions of the plot.

The plot is a conscious design, *artificial, no matter how you look at it.* It is an artifice. But while it is in itself mechanical, yet it must conform to all the laws that shall govern the

artistic illusion that is to elaborate it. A story can no more hide a deformed plot, than a hunchback can conceal the crooked vertebræ that holds his life fluid.

Your plot must be just as logical, consistent and plausible as you expect your finished story to be. Therefore, it behooves the writer to thresh out all the difficulties in the way of his progress *while he is working over his plot,* and not wait until he comes flat against them in the story itself. For this often means that he will have to tear down half, if not all, that he has built, in order to provide consistency and logical reasons for the change.

The mere narrative plods steadily along, and is interesting only in so far as it entertains or informs the reader. The Short Story must do more. It must elicit his sympathies, prey upon his hopes and fears, and rouse his imagination to a pitch of active service. All this is accomplished by means of the artificial devices employed in the plot, chief among which is *the obstacle.*

Your perfect plot must have an obstacle.

The chief function of the plot is to create an obstacle.

There must be an obstacle looming between the complete happiness of your hero and your heroine. If you set about to tell the story of their unalloyed happiness, you are merely laying a plan that is likely to bore your reader. He is more interested in how the hero or heroine won or lost their happiness than in knowing to what degree they are enjoying it. Each of the incidents, or minor crises, may consist of an obstacle. The ultimate crisis, or the Climax, of the story, represents the final and greatest obstacle in the whole story, in the process of being removed.

Most geniuses are lawless, and too often suffer because of their talents, instead of benefiting by them.

CHAPTER IV

Laws Governing the Plot

THE DRAMATIC UNITIES, WITH AN ADDITIONAL UNITY; CARE; COMPRESSION; SIMPLICITY; DESPATCH; COMPLETENESS.

ONE of the first requisites of a good short-story plot, is a close observance of the "dramatic unities" of Time, Place and Action. To these the Modern Short Story adds a fourth Unity—that of Person. In this connection, the Short Story and the one-act Play are almost identical in their effort to produce *effect*. They differ widely, however, in many other respects, since the former relies wholly on the *writer* to accomplish its purpose; while the latter is greatly assisted by *actors*.

A plot, therefore, should be carefully designed with a view to preserving unity, or singleness, of effect. And the admonition here concerning the plot, closely corresponds in

part to the definition of the Modern Short Story: So plan, or plot, that the action shall transpire, as nearly as possible, within one period of Time; that the scene shall be confined, as nearly as possible, to one Place; that the story shall center chiefly around one Person, and that everything in the story shall contribute to one great Situation, or Action, the whole to produce an overpowering, single Impression on the mind of the reader.

The sum of it all, is a painstaking practice of compression. There is a turbulent tendency, when it comes to narrating the story, to digress. To plot carefully, then, is one of the essential elements in the mechanics of the Modern Short Story.

Be careful, however, and see that your economy of details never becomes parsimony. A plot must have every bone that the body of the perfect story is supposed to have.

The problem, and its solution, that confronts the short-story writer, is almost the same as that lying before the architect, except that the writer is artisan as well as artist. If the architect should leave the necessary kitchen out of

his plans until the builder should discover the error, and then try to crowd the kitchen in, the perfection of the whole house would be marred. Writers often meet with an analogous catastrophe, in that they fail to provide for some vital contingency of their finished story in their plan, or plot, with the result that they have either to rebuild the entire structure, which is always the better course to pursue, or to follow the forced course of the house-builder, and make a botched job of it. This is a common experience due to poor plot construction.

The units of the plot are the unembellished units of the story itself. The plot is the potent organism of motives; the story the effective organization of incidents.

The plot of the Modern Short Story must consist of a plan that is as *simple* as it is concise. It is neither advisable nor necessary to make your short-story plot too complicated. Likewise, a counter, or sub-plot, has no place in the Modern Short Story.

One reason for this rule lies in the need of despatch, an inviolable Law of the Modern

Short Story. Details multiply in the complicated story, and hamper the rapid, clean and telling strokes that only the simple plot is capable of rendering.

The plot of the Short Story must be *complete*.

By this is meant that it must comprise one complete action, and not include a complete life, which is the province of the Novel, and might furnish a thousand short-story plots.

As a test of the simplicity of a plot, it should be reducible, in its simplest form, to a few words, or a sentence.

In fine, the method employed in arranging plot matters touches upon the vital characteristics of the Short Story itself. While the plot may be based on real happenings from actual life, those happenings are rearranged according to the artificial requirements of the story in mind. Unessential happenings are eliminated, invented details elaborated.

The plot then ignores facts and caters only to fiction.

If you cannot take a thing apart, how do you expect to put it together?

CHAPTER V

PLOT ANALYSIS

"MRS. KNOLLYS" AND "THE NECKLACE" AS EXAMPLES; THE TRIANGLE PLOT

THERE are various phases of what might correctly be called the plot of a Short Story.

For example, the plot of the story, "Mrs. Knollys," by Frederick J. Stimson, might be briefly outlined as follows:

(EXAMPLE 1.) A happy young couple, spending their honeymoon in Austria, near the Pasterzen Glacier, are tragically separated by a fatal accident, which plunged the young husband into a bottomless crevasse of the glacier. The stricken wife learned from a scientist that, at the end of forty-five years, the portion of the glacier containing her husband's body would emerge in the open. The woman waits to see this transpire!

That is the plot, or what might better be called the *gist of the story.*

The author, when he conceived *the idea for the story,* may have had little or none of the

subsequent development in mind. It may have been simply,

(EXAMPLE 2.) How to represent in fiction the lifelong devotion of a young wife.

This is how most *problem* or *idea* stories are conceived.

On the other hand, it might have come to him this way:

(EXAMPLE 3.) Reads of the controversy between two German scientists concerning the internal movement of glaciers. One claims they do not move at all. The other that they move approximately one mile in forty-five years. How to put that into fiction? Perhaps a love story?

This example illustrates how the writer with the eternally plotting mind—which every writer should develop—may take the most remote and seemingly uninteresting bit of material from the current news and turn it into a great story. This story was selected, more for its adaption to illustration, than because of its perfection in construction.

But let us continue to analyze the possible ways in which this plot might have been conceived:

(EXAMPLE 4.) Mr. Stimson's mind might have been directly inspired by actual observation of a glacier and its awful crevasses, without any scientific basis whatever for his assertion.

These examples should serve to point a sort of moral to the writer when he has got hold of a splendid basic idea or plot germ for a story: Do not commence in earnest until you have examined the material from every point of view and selected the finer possibilities for story effect. There is always one plot phase that is infinitely better than all the rest. Mr. Stimson's story, for instance, may have had its inception from a homely local tragedy, out of which he wove a story of epic proportions that has won a place in Literature.

(EXAMPLE 5.) Let us assume that the local incident was a case of a young girl and her lover skating on the Mill Pond, when he is lost thru an air-hole in the ice. She waited till Spring for the ice to thaw, watching daily at the mill race, where the body would appear. The author changed the scene to Austria, and enlarged the scale of the whole incident to epic proportions.

This latter method is an excellent one for writers to pattern after when employing newspaper clippings as a source of plots.

Different authors conceive their plots according to their lights.

One may think over an abstract idea until he is able to tack it on a concrete incident, then

his plot is complete. He reasons from the general to the particular; as in Example 2.

Another will take a specific incident and make it illustrate an abstract theme, reasoning from the particular to the general, as shown by Example 3.

To illustrate how carefully short-story masters observe the exigencies of the plot, look at the perfect agreement between the opening and the closing lines of De Maupassant's "The Necklace":

(EXAMPLE 6.) "She had no dowry, no expectations. . . ." (The story opens.) "'You say that you bought a diamond necklace to replace mine?" (The same girl is asked at the Climax.) "'Why, mine was false!'" (She is told after living a wasted life of tragedy because she had lost a few bits of glass. How natural for the girl described in the first line, to make the terrible mistake that precipitated the tragedy in the story!)

Again, in "Mrs. Knollys" the plot agreement is perfect:

(EXAMPLE 7.) "The Great Pasterzen Glacier rises in Western Austria and flows into Carintnia" . . . "Meantime the great Pasterzen moves on."

These beginnings perfectly foreshadow the endings. Therein lies the plot. From the first line, cumulative force is provided for the

narration of the story, and the reader is bound to be rewarded with a gratifying sense of having been treated with consideration.

"Mrs. Knollys" as an anecdote, would have been simply the report of an "accident."

A "true story," without plot, of the same, would have included Mrs. Knolly's sad home-coming and her quiet life of widowhood, or her remarriage, or other details, with her sublime patience and her recovery of her husband more than likely unrecorded.

Your plot must provide then that at a certain point in your story, usually at the Climax, there must be either (1) a tremendous change in the life, or in the social relations, of your chief character; or (2) your obstacle must be removed; or (3) the unforeseen must happen; or (4) a powerful crisis must intervene that shall make a hoped-for change impossible and thereby affect the reader by antithesis, thru Tragedy. Those are the four chief variants affecting the story thru the operation of the plot.

We may touch briefly here on the most overworked of all plots, the Triangle, so called

because of the inevitable trio of characters that people the story:

(EXAMPLE 8.) This is the theme of nine out of ten of all the love stories that will ever be written. It is a hideous weapon in the hands of the plotless amateur with which to try to break into editorial esteem. All writers, however, seem to employ it sometime or another. Every beginner beguiles himself into thinking he has discovered a new phase of the Triangle that has never before seen the editor's office, with results too trite to mention.

Do not hesitate even for this reason. There is nothing new under the sun, so it behooves the writer then to strive to attain one virtue—to *be original.*

Remember, that when the Triangle is mentioned, we cannot but recall a few at random who have pleaded guilty, in a gratifying manner:

(EXAMPLE 9.) *Boccaccio—"The Story of Griselda."*
Bret Harte—"Tennessee's Partner."
H. C. Bunner—"A Sisterly Scheme."
Alexander Poushkin — "The Shot."
Poe—"The Cask of Amontillado."

Balzac—"La Grande Bretche."
Maurice Hewlett—"The Ruinous Face."
O. Henry—"A Chapparal Christmas Gift."

Emotion is the Magic Gateway that opens to the Fairy Fields of Imagination; the fortunate writer who finds the key may set down all of the glories of Heaven, that shall enable him to enjoy many of the luxuries of Earth!

CHAPTER VI

Inspiration

MOOD, STIMULANTS; THE POWERS AND EMPLOYMENT OF IMAGINATION

WHEN we say that mood should be made a potent factor in the production of artistic fiction, we realize that we lay ourselves open to ridicule from not a few who have succeeded with seemingly no assistance from this mooted quarter. Hard and unremitting labor alone won them laurels. Day in and day out, they dug out their five thousand words, whether they felt like it or not.

(EXAMPLE 10.) The anecdotes have it, and they may be true, that the professional humorist has

the exterior of an undertaker, and that the sweet girl graduate writes nothing but tragedy. The one wrote his best joke to pay for flowers for his dead child. The other eats chocolates while she deliberately stabs her heroine to the heart! The artistic value of the "copy," however, of the two scribblers referred to, is apt to be open to serious criticism, for some reason or other.

Mood refers to a state of mind under the influence of a specific emotion. Mood and inspiration are near relatives. Without inspiration you cannot hope to have an original plot. With what mood you expand the germ of your plot into a logical fiction-plan, that mood is the star under which your story is born and which foretells its destiny.

Harmony of mood and theme is at least courting the smile of the propitious gods; discord between mood and theme, as per example mentioned, is a bid to disaster in treatment.

Some authors, when they have waited in vain for inspiration, get in a peevish mood, and deliberately set about to stimulate the desired mood. They claim that this procedure never fails to kindle their imaginations with lively, original trains of thought.

On the other hand, there are husky writers who will scoff at this "hot-house" method. Yet, if you will take the trouble to learn what these same writers do, when they arrive at the maddening point where they do not seem to have a single idea that is worth while, where they cannot grind out another line, they, too, seek their "stimulants" in that form best suited to their temperaments. It may be that they go to a base-ball game, and they return to their work filled with enthusiasm. They, too, have sought and found the feeder for their creative streak—which happened to be thru a sort of physical exultation—while the other man's is rather thru mental, sensuous or æsthetic stimuli.

Every writer has his healthy inspirational medium, which it will be worth much for him to discover and to cultivate.

It is needless to say, that stimulants of an injurious nature are not included in this category, even tho Balzac was given to black coffee, De Quincy to opium and Poe to alcohol.

But, to refer to the experience of actual American writers of to-day, there are those

who do get their inspiration from the theatre, from the opera, from flowers, from the sight of glorious scenery, from reading poetry—as well as from a thousand other influences that have a peculiar "personal" value.

These authors seek their natural inspirations the moment they get their plot germ; or after a futile struggle with an obstinate plot; or when a plot has yielded a most unsatisfactory story plan; or maybe on all occasions when plotting their story.

Bear one thing in mind. If you are genuinely inspired when you are conceiving your plot, your reader will be inspired to a like degree while unravelling it.

Inspiration by means of "stimulants" then is not "rot," but infectious life.

Mood and inspiration are the heralds of the imagination. And it is only a charity to say, that the aspirant to short-story laurels who does not possess a luxuriant imagination had better abandon further effort in that pursuit. It is not a difficult matter for any writer to test his powers effectually in this direction. In fact, the plot requires an elaborate demon-

stration of the imaginative powers. With a few bare, telling outlines, the author is called upon to put it all to the test by filling in every detail with his imaginative, or pictorial, sense. The artist-painter is compelled to exercise practically the same functions as the artist-writer, when from a few charcoaled lines he can discern his priceless *chef d'œuvre*.

One thing that every writer will learn sooner or later, is that imagination, like the proverbial horse, may be driven to water, but it cannot be made to drink.

The process of plotting requires the most fertile use of the imagination. Writers of experience know, too, that their imaginative powers are subject to serious variation. The moment those powers begin to grow stale they will not budge. It is time then to switch off. Read an inspiring book, talk with a congenial companion, listen to a sermon, a lecture, anything that will bring an interchange of thought and get you out of the vicious groove of your own sterility of the moment. Inspire, as we do not need to be told, means to "breathe in." Take it literally, and go seek outside things

and thoughts to breathe in. We shall then know the joy of learning that, what was impossible this morning, proves easy this afternoon.

Plotting the Short Story is largely a problem of Science; Narrating it is altogether a matter of Art.

CHAPTER VII

The Process of Plotting

IMPORTANT DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THAT OF PLOTTING AND OF NARRATING THE STORY

THE two processes, that of plotting and that of narrating, are distinctly different from each other, and should be dealt with separately.

It is the violation of this important rule that accounts for more than half of the failures rejected by editorial offices.

Nine-tenths of all the work done while plotting is accomplished by an exercise of the purely mental faculties. Even inspiration, mood and imagination are called forth to generate new and original ideas for mechanical purposes. The plot is not intended to be a thing of beauty, but an engine of power,

strength and purpose. It is the *deus ex machina*. Never once do we let loose our powers of eloquence and elaboration. From first to last it must represent an *impassive* tower of strength.

In other words, we proceed coldly, artificially, only seeking to convert a given mass of material into units that will best suit our purposes, enforcing our own logical order by twisting Time by the tail, as it were. We deal mainly with facts, or stimulate fancy only for the purpose of creating new "facts" with which to delude the reader. Details, episodes and incidents that have no bearing on the direct line of movement of the story in hand, no matter how much we may cherish them, or how beautiful and effective they may be in themselves, ruthlessly must be thrown aside. We thus make Selection and Elimination our greatest virtues; and Detail and Digression our greatest vices.

To plot, then, we assume a deliberate, calculating attitude. We view our work dispassionately, soullessly, heartlessly. Enthusiasm we must have, of course, but it must not blind

us to our purpose of planning a structure by the aid of rule and compass to be erected within limited boundaries.

On the other hand, narrating the Short Story is a process of fire! With the plot, or plan, in our minds and hearts we commence to build! We give the mental automaton a soul. We breath life and reality into its powerful frame. We absorb the plot and then, in a way, forget it or suppress it in the flow of our inspiration. We are guided by it, of course. But to restrain our torrent of narration by pausing to think would in a measure be fatal. Narration is a matter of feeling, of emotion, of living the lives and the story *within* and setting it down without, with a pen, while it is all hot and fresh.

The two processes—Plotting and Narrating—are as far apart as the Poles.

The same faculties are never called into play, so different are they. It is as if an artist would set out to paint his *chef d'œuvre* without measurements, without sketch, without model. But when your mind is engaged with the anxious problem of trying to meet all the

stern requirements of the Modern Short Story, it does not stand to reason that it can do its best and most artistic work of telling the story, *at the same time.*

The necessity to *think* out plot essentials will not, naturally, keep pace with the desire to *tell* the story. One is bound to hamper, and hinder the perfect development of the other. The telling part usually gets the best of it, with the result that the finished story often is the story we like it to be, instead of the story it ought to be. It will contain incidents, episodes and details which we can never bring ourselves to sacrifice when we have once created them. The truth is that the plot will have been made incidental to the Narration.

If we intend to make the Modern Short Story a permanent form in Literature, we must establish working laws conducive to the best possible effort on the part of its writers.

Plot your story entirely, first, before you begin to narrate it.

You will find your work one hundred per cent. easier, and your results infinitely better and nearer the mark of perfection.

Winged Imagination must have some earthly ground from which to take flight, even tho it be the apex of some granite mountain peak thrust into the fleecy clouds of Fantasy!

CHAPTER VIII

The Progressive Stages in Plotting

THE PLOT GERM; THE PLOT SKELETON; THE PLOT SCENARIO; EXAMPLES

SOME of the most clear-headed and talented writers will have it that they get their plots entire:—inception and conception; idea and motive; hide and hair—out of their own brains with no manner of suggestion from outside agencies. We believe them, of course, because they believe what they say to be true. But is it, true? Can it be true? In a small measure, maybe.

Even tho a writer gets his entire plot material from a dream, there must be a whole lot of hard fact mixed up with it. Psychologists

tell us that dreams are nothing more than our real experiences carried actively, but subliminally, on by the impetus of our emotions and desires.

(EXAMPLE 11.) Take, for instance, the writer who claimed that he was indebted to no outside source whatever for his plot of a Star Maiden who descended to earth and fell in love with a man. He had never read, nor heard tell of, nor seen, nor, in any manner whatsoever, had the ghost of knowledge of a precedent before he set his imagination to work looking for a Plot Germ.

But the Plot Germ seldom contains the specific elements that appear in the finished plot. The suggestion for the foregoing plot, wherein the Star Maiden makes her earthly appearance encased in a celestial mantle, was strongly reminiscent of what we might suppose the tail of a comet to be. And when we bear in mind the appearance of Halley's Comet, which created the greatest universal emotional impression that had been known for a decade, it is not unlikely that such an idea as the story contained might not have been subconsciously garnered from the store-house of personal impressions, where not among the least of these must have been that created by the sight of that marvelous phenomenon. We might

just as readily think of other concrete, outside objects that might have suggested it.

Bear in mind, then, that tho your imagination may sweep the heavens for a Plot Germ, its roots may be always traced to the earth upon which we pass our daily lives.

The Plot Germ will not necessarily form the beginning of the story, nor the end, nor the climax. It is merely the beginning of the train of thought that will eventually lead to the complete plot. The Plot Germ is usually something striking, that catches our seeking thoughts. It may develop in any direction that will best expand the train of thought that it awakens. It even may be lost sight of altogether, as we inferred in our hypothesis of the plot of the Star Maiden that had been born of a comet.

(EXAMPLE 12.) The memory of an old song sung years before, arouses a desire to do again what the writer had done on the memorable occasion when it had originally been sung.

That was the Plot Germ that called forth the Plot Skeleton of the following story, that bears little, if any, resemblance:

(EXAMPLE 13.) The sad story of the love of two men for one girl, woven round the singing of

the old song, "Rosalie," which they all sang together one moonlight night on a road by the lakeside. The narrator, sad because this song is wound around his loss of the girl, the other man, glad because he won her—stole her from his friend. The narrator marries after years, another girl. The other man went to the bad soon after his young bride died. He comes to the home of the narrator and contemplates the crime of robbing his friend. The friend discovers the attempt at the psychological moment and sees but one way to thwart it and save the potential criminal. He seeks a spot from which he may easily be heard—tho concealed—by the criminal, and begins softly to whistle "Rosalie." The night is almost identical in every detail with that night of long ago. The false friend pauses in his fell work, then resumes it. Then the true friend in his best voice softly sings the song of songs. At length the other man drops down and weeps. The poignant memory had split his heart. He quietly leaves the house a new man.

The fist stage in plotting the story is to get hold of the Plot Germ.

A host of ideas may come to you with such profusion as to almost capsize your good intention of sticking to the inexorable rules of the plot of the perfect Short Story. A single step, however, in the right direction will bring you face to face with the clear solution of your difficulty. *Seek your climax.* This may sound like a singular proceeding. But the reason for it is evident, when we repeat that

the Climax is the point towards which every incident in the plot is tending with cumulative force. Get a motive for your plot, then, and every stage in the building of it will be constructed intelligently. Keep the Climax before you as your ultimate goal and you will attain in your story that singleness of impression and effect that is being harped on continually.

The final stage of plotting the Short Story is the Plot Scenario. This consists of the *complete* plot preparatory to the beginning of the Narration of the story. Every particle of the vital motivating matter of the story itself will be found in the Scenario. Every critical incident and step in the progress of the story is in its proper sequence; every obstacle is in its place opposing the progress of the story and spicing it with suspense; still every least problem has been solved. It stands like an untried, completed locomotive, a figure of potential power, waiting for the fire to generate the steam that will pour thru its veins and start it forth with all the grace and majesty of motion and released energy.

All the writer need do is to glance at his

Scenario now and then when in doubt and then fall to with a spirit of freedom and unhampered inspiration. If he is a born writer his hard work is over. There is nothing quite equivalent to the flow of one's soul fire thru the end of one's pen. That is Art for Art's sake, which is man's nearest approach to one of the Creator'ss attributes—that of making matter out of soul stuff!

Plot incidents are arranged in that order best calculated to sustain the reader's interest and to build up an inevitable Climax.

CHAPTER IX

Arrangement of Events

CHRONOLOGICAL AND LOGICAL ORDERS; NATURAL SEQUENCE; STORY INTEREST

AT first sight, there would seem to be only two considerations possible in the sequence of plot incidents, or minor crises; namely: chronological order and logical order. But there is an arrangement of events, still more important, to be observed by short-story writers—the enforced "natural" order of events.

While the relation of facts requires absolute subservience to chronological and logical sequence of events, the narration of fiction demands, first of all, cumulative story interest of its incidents and events.

It is the natural procedure, in the relation of

facts, to tell the most important event in precisely the place where it happened in actuality —usually near the beginning of a series of events, in the middle of them, but seldom at the end.

If the story writer attempts to utilize facts as bases of his plot, whether they form an absorbing epoch in History, or a fascinating record of crime, he will find himself obliged to rearrange this material to meet the requirements of short-story construction.

To revert to History, then, and take an example of its method of telling its story, multitudes of which may be employed as plot material.

(EXAMPLE 14.) The United States declared their independence, 1776; had war with England, 1812; were torn by Civil War, 1861-5.

There is the cold, impartial record of facts, in their exact chronological order.

(EXAMPLE 15.) The newspaper item, for instance, that may be the source of a complete short-story plot, invariably presents and discloses its Climax first, using the identical incident that the Short Story employs at its zenith:

BLASTS HER NAME
BUT MAY NOT
SAVE MAN FROM PRISON

Chicago Prosecutor Says That
Woman's Sacrifices For Doctor
Will Be In Vain
Looks like "frame-up,"
But Cleminson, convicted,
hopes for new trial
thru Mrs. Schmidt.

To attempt to employ the events in the order of the news heading, would be worse than a waste of time. To utilize these facts in a fiction plot, the author would probably rearrange his material.

(EXAMPLE 16.) Cleminson, convicted of murder. Hopes for new trial without apparent grounds for it. Chicago prosecutor is annoyed by this hopefulness. Mrs. Schmidt has not been called to the stand yet. The day arrives when she is. There is a great scene in the court room. She blasts her name eternally for the prisoner's sake. At the last moment, the suspicious prosecutor gets proof that this is a "frame-up." Cleminson is not released. . . . To what lengths won't the love of a woman venture?

To evolve a plot out of the love story of John and Rebecca, for instance, requires a careful search for the few vital incidents among the multitudinous facts of their everyday life.

(EXAMPLE 17.) John wakes in the morning, bathes, breakfasts, reads the paper, goes to business, etc., lunches, attends to business, etc., returns home,

dons evening dress, dines, buys flowers, calls on Rebecca, where he finds rival.

To say the least, such a mass of detail as that would weary any reader. A plot would die if filled with it.

(EXAMPLE 18.) All that really concerns a fiction story in the above material, is possibly that—"John buys flowers, calls on Rebecca, where he finds rival."

When we seek information, we want to know the important fact first. It helps us to form our judgment of other connective facts that follow, and learn its evolution. To acquire knowledge of any given subject, no detail is too insignificant to bring forth as testimony; that is the nature of all scientific knowledge and its acquisition. Facts are sought, then, for the knowledge, information and education they yield.

Fiction, however, is instructive in an occasional secondary application only. *Fiction's vital function is to entertain.* It has primarily to do with the emotions, and not with the mind. Its chief aim, as exemplified in the plot, is to reserve the most important event, or incident, or major crisis, or Climax—as it should be called—to the very last.

Our discussion of the nature of the Modern Short Story admonished us to suppress details. Likewise, it taught us to choose *a single event or happening,* and stick to it thru thick and thin, employing such incidents only that play a vital part in bringing it to pass.

(EXAMPLE 19.) "A Visit to the Cotton Mill," "The Perils of Tuberculosis," or "An Exercise in Algebra," would be more likely to interest the mind than to stir the emotions. For that reason they are not fit subjects as motive plot themes.

But, if you want to show your readers what you know about a cotton mill, or a tragedy of tuberculosis with a note of hope in it, or a unique problem in algebra, and yet entertain, primarily employing fiction for the purpose, it can be done thru the intervention of the science of the plot coupled with the art of Narration.

(EXAMPLE 20.) "The Fight at the Cotton Mill"—here utilize your familiar knowledge, thru vivid realism. "The White Fower"—might be the love story plot of two tubercular persons, each of whom will not disclose his and her love, thinking the other has not the disease; their strength of purpose leads to a double cure. "The Professor's Problem"—might form the material for a clever plot wherein algebra actually solves the marriage problem.

The short-story plot is built up of units of

progression. When the plot is complete these have been so cleverly welded together in a supporting structure for the story, that the removal of a single unit would threaten the destruction of the whole. An incident too much, or one missing, or out of place, means, at the very least, that the perfection of the story is inevitably impaired. In fact, all that plot is really concerned with is the events in the forthcoming story and their sequence.

Each unit of the plot must necessarily, because of its demands for compression and economy, be vital. It should consist of a minor crisis, rather than a mere episode or incident that might be classed as "detail." Study the stories that have stood the test of time and, in most cases, they will stand the test of plot sequence. Every crisis has been arranged, perhaps after untold labor on the part of the author, with a view to rendering its greatest aid and efficiency towards the culmination of the story. This must be studied out by every writer in his process of plotting.

First, last, and all the time, keep your eye fixed on your Climax.

When you have your story fairly well planned out "in your head"—which is the best step before setting down anything but the plot germ, or plot notes to be put away for future reference—then begin work on your plot skeleton, by setting down the events as you have them collated in your mind. Work over this skeleton until you feel certain that the order of crises is arranged to the best advantage for the Climax.

Now comes the last step in the plot formation—the complete Scenario. It is a good plan to number your crises—1, 2, 3, etc.—allotting a single paragraph to each. Make sure that every crisis is a progressive unit. If it is not, eliminate it. By adopting this plan of numbering and paragraphing the crises, the units will stand out distinctly, before the eye of the plot builder, in adjustable form. Figure out mentally whether a rearrangement of the crises would not strengthen the Climax. Become convinced that you do not need another crisis to make the plot complete, or that there is not one too many already. Remember, that the plot in its Scenario form, is its last appearance

as a flexible body. Once you start the story for which that Scenario is the basis, you must finish it, or build a new Scenario. Every action that is to take place in the story must be fully indicated in the plot.

As we have said, the material as it stands in the Plot Scenario is plastic, therefore it easily may be altered to suit any form of Narration.

(EXAMPLE 21.) (1) The story within a story, or one narrated by some person not the chief character, always opens with the present time, reverting to the past, and finally bringing the action of the story back to the present again with the conclusion of it. Kipling uses this form in many of his early Indian tales. It is one that is obviously artificial, and should be avoided. (2) The same story told in the first person, either by the hero or an ever-present participator in the events, would demand a slight rearrangement of the order. (3) Again, the story starting right out from the shoulder, told in the third person, and taking the reader into its omniscient confidence, might eliminate certain crises altogether and employ its own logical order to arrive at the Climax. (4) The story told by a series of letters, for instance, demands a clever arrangement of material so that the writer of the letters, the recipient of them and the reader of the story will become aware of each event in its proper cumulative order.

Before beginning the process of Narration, be sure that your order of sequence is the one

best suited to the style your story assumes. The plot is your creation. Make use of the passage of time therein whatever way will best give reality to your story, naturalness to action and strength to its Climax.

The story writer's "logical" order of incidents is of his own creation. In other words, the logic of the fiction story is not the logic of the syllogism, but consists of a faithful organic consistency. Any series of events that *might happen,* can happen in the Short Story—else where would our precious Romances be? But whatever happens, or however it transpires, it *must seem natural,* even tho it be the wildest story of adventure or the most fantastic fairy tale. If Romance is not made to seem reality, it is a failure as an artistic effort. Likewise, Realism must borrow from the Unreal, for it is only thru a nice blending of the two that we get good fiction.

In "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," we have a sequence of events that is scarcely logical in the accepted meaning of the term. Yet they are in perfect accord with the aim and spirit

of the story, and their logic is never questioned by the most rational reader.

It should be the aim of the short-story writer to commence his story with an incident that is both powerful and interesting enough to grip the reader's enduring attention. To do this he is obliged to sacrifice chronological order, nine times out of ten. For it is usually the case that incidents happening before the opening of the story are in a great measure responsible for the existing character, predicament, or tragedy that is being depicted. To step aside from the chronological order of events, however, and still make good use of foregoing data, requires the most delicate art of the short-story teller. The inexperienced and unartistic writer will flounder along with frequent explanations, or endanger the perfect technique of his work by tacking on a prolog or an epilog.

The Short Story is indeed so short and concise that references to past events must be made in more than half the stories written. Follow chronological order whenever it is pos-

sible, as long as you do not sacrifice your Climax in so doing.

(EXAMPLE 22.) In "The Shot," by Poushkin, the Climax hangs on an episode of years' standing: "He is always joking, once he gave me a slap in the face in a joke; on another occasion he sent a bullet thru my cap in a joke!"

Equally effective we find another instance:

(EXAMPLE 23.) "The Man Who Was" becomes known to his old associates thru the words written twenty-five years before. Looking over the roll of the regiment, an officer exclaims, "Here we are! Lieut. Dustin Limason—missing!"

The incidents in both of these examples are kneaded into the stories so skilfully that they have become one and inseparable. If they had merely preceded the stories, in a more or less detached form, what followed would have seemed flat. If they had been clumsy explanations, occurring at the wrong time, there would have been no big moment in the stories. They were in truth the very incidents that made the stories great.

Every plot should admit of perfect evolution and solution. There are just so many incidents necessary in each story to acquire this state of perfection. There is a certain order best qualified to attain ideal effects. More

than mere complication of incidents is required. Each incident may be compared to a stone in an arch (supporting the story structure); each has been carefully chiselled until it fits exactly and only in its own place. In the center, supporting the tremendous weight of the whole structure, is the keystone (the Climax). One stone disarranged or eliminated, and the entire edifice is sure either to be distorted or destroyed.

Work out all your difficulties of order and sequence while plotting your story.

When you have threshed out your plot you will have solved all your mechanical and scientific difficulties, and may set to work upon your Narration with no formidable handicaps. You will feel the assurance of a skilled laborer, or the man who has mastered and loves his trade, who puts his soul as well as his sweat into his toil; and who would scorn to cheapen his product for mere increase of wage.

When a plot goes running thru the pages of a story, with the cries of "Extra! Murder! Mystery!" etc., rousing innocent readers to follow it pell-mell—all well and good. But when the plot can run no farther, and the breathless reader catches up with it, Mr. Plot must explain what the row is all about. This point of turning is the Climax.

CHAPTER X

Plot Development

THE LAWS OF MOVEMENT AND ACTION; SUPREME MOMENT; CLIMAX; WHEREIN IT DIFFERS FROM CONCLUSION; DENOUEMENT; NECESSITY FOR COMPLETE ACTION; THE END; THE EFFECT.

THERE may be any number of crises in a given Short Story, but *there can be only one Climax.*

We shall employ the term "crisis" to indicate the paragraphical turning points or plot

units of which the complete plot is composed, and that produce the inevitable Grand Crisis, or Climax, or turning point in the story. The crises are the big moments that ring in the changes, disclosures and dramatic situations that tighten the readers' suspense and interest and mark the rising development of the story. The Climax is the supreme moment, it is the Grand Crisis, that comes when suspense will no longer stand the strain, and interest no longer hangs on the progression of the story, but on its pause and possible retrogression.

This is the point observed in the old-fashioned tales, and the old-fashioned drama (never natural and seldom artistic), when all the characters employed thruout—and have lived thru it—are assembled to receive their just rewards and punishments in neat parcels.

Without intermittent crises a story, even tho it rises steadily, or preserves a high and exciting pitch from the opening word, is bound to suffer from monotone—which invariably leads to monotony.

Perfection in all branches of artistic expression is recognized, first and foremost,

because of the artist's power in the use of chiaroscuro, or light and shade. But this law applies to all things that please, entertain and interest humanity. As, for instance, joy is scarcely joy to the soul that has not tasted woe. It is in following the recurring fortunes and misfortunes of the hero that the reader gets his entertainment. The amount of each of these changes is a crisis.

In "The Ambitious Guest," Hawthorne piles up interest by means of his quiet crises, each one winding up the intensity tighter and tighter.

(EXAMPLE 24.) "The daughter had just uttered some simple jest that filled them all with mirth, when the wind came thru the Notch and seemed to pause before their cottage. . . . For a moment it saddened them."

There is barely a suggestion of change here, yet the reader *feels* a change, and his interest is keyed a note higher. The next change is more strongly suggestive:

(EXAMPLE 25.) "The whole family rose as if about to welcome someone who belonged to them, and whose fate was linked to theirs. . . . . The door was opened by a young man."

But there is no mistaking the Grand Crisis when it comes:

(EXAMPLE 26.) "Then the same shriek burst simultaneously from all their lips: 'The slide! The slide!'"

In fact, there must be no other crisis in the story that bears any comparison to the Grand Crisis, or Climax. For, to repeat, the Short Story consists of a single action culminated in the Climax, and completed in the denouement, or conclusion. If there be two crises, which may equally be called the Grand Crisis, one of them must be the real Climax, but the other the anti-climax, which nullifies by its presence the desired single impression.

Each crisis that appears before the Climax must raise the pitch and tighten the suspense. On the other hand, each crisis that follows the Climax must lower the pitch toward the normal, and loosen the tautened interest. In "Mrs. Knollys," the Climax occurs, of course, at the moment of the reappearance of her husband's body on the glacier, after forty years of waiting. The next crisis descends:

(EXAMPLE 27.) "Then at last the long-kept tears came to her."

The exact position of the Climax in the plot is variable, and must be determined by the nature of the story in hand. Its natural

place is as near the end as possible. Lengthened denouements are inartistic, when applied to the Modern Short Story. But by an artistic denouement is not meant one following an artificial, invariable rule of Procrustes, but a law of Cause and Effect, regulated by a nice sense of Balance and Completeness, unaccompanied by any feeling of repletion.

Keep the element of suspense rising continually to the very instant of the Climax—when it is highest—then make it fall just as rapidly as you can, and still preserve your poise.

But the same is not true of the element of interest. Do not confuse the two terms. For, if anything, *the reader's interest, after the Climax, soars higher, reaching its zenith at the conclusion!*

The best test for knowing at just what point to end either your plot or your story, is answered—*the moment the interest begins to drop.*

The Conclusion of either plot or story is the End. The Climax is the turning point in suspense. The Denouement is that portion

of the story between Climax and Conclusion. The term Conclusion oftentimes is made to include denouement. This is especially true in the case of the Novel, wherein one or more chapters are devoted to the conclusion, which means the denouement, or the "untying" of the knot made by the plot.

Many short stories, however, require little or no denouement—they simply conclude. That is, their Climax and conclusion are identical. This method is more consistent with the guiding principles of the Modern Short Story, and is in itself decidedly more artistic than a more or less lengthy denouement. In the cases of the majority of the greatest published Short Stories, no denouement has been necessary.

(EXAMPLE 28.) This is true in "The Necklace." one of De Maupassant's best stories: "Oh, my poor Mathilde. But mine were false. At most they were worth five hundred francs!" That is the end of the story, and there is no doubt of the powerful effect left in the mind of the reader, that would have been weakened by more words."

(EXAMPLE 29.) In "Markheim," Stevenson concludes in practically the same manner: "You had better go for the police," said he, "I have killed your master."

The Conclusion, then, is the unwinding of

the plot, even tho this be accomplished in a single word. It falls in the third of the three divisions into which all narrative is divided—beginning, middle and end.

If anything, the conclusion of the plot requires greater artistic handling than either the beginning or the development of it, for by the conclusion it is determined whether or not your effort may be adjudged properly a Short Story. With your conclusion rests the responsibility of producing the all-essential *single impression.* Economy is the watchword of the conclusion—tho be careful not to be niggardly if your denouement demands elaboration. And, to be economical, one must bear continually in mind that every incident, crisis, situation, scene and character, other than the chief one, have been employed for no other purpose than to heighten your single impression. Your plot is to develop a single Grand Crisis, which shall emphasize one powerful situation in a Climax, and produce a certain unified effect by means of the Conclusion. The destiny of any but the chief character is decidedly another story.

The more unravelling a plot requires in its denouement, the greater the danger of losing the valued singleness of effect. You are apt to make your point, and then lose it. Therefore it is well to provide for the future of your secondary characters as they appear in the plot, so that they will not stride out to the front the moment the chief actor needs the entire stage to make the greatest play of his life.

Without a satisfying conclusion, or denouement, the crescendo of the plot is incomplete. The Climax of the Short Story brings the hero to a most critical phase in his life—facing peril, death, disgrace, exile, etc.—the conclusion or denouement must satisfactorily dispose of the ordeal. You cannot pattern after the continued stories, leaving your poor hero in his predicament, "to be continued in our next," living thru as many life-and-death crises as there are chapters. Nor have you recourse to the drama's artifice of prolonging suspense, by bringing down the curtain on the second act.

You must do it *now*. Your one, supreme

action must be completed at one sitting—as Poe has it—and leave one impression in the mind of the reader.

When the Climax is reached, the short-story reader demands, "Well, what of him *now?* I must know at once! Tell me the quickest way you know how. Kill him, if you must; save him, if you can—but get this suspense over!"

The short-story plot should set out to do one thing, and then complete it!

There is a slight difference between the end of the plot and the end of the story. In the case of the former, it signifies the end of the organic and mechanical elements employed in the story. The end of the story simply means the last word of it.

There is a certain psychology in plot endings, that bears fruit in the effect of the story. But however true this may be, there is but one artistic ending to any given plot. Separation and death inevitably produce the bad ending. And, bear in mind, if you let death overtake your hero, *that story ends on the spot.* This means, of course, where the hero has been "the whole show." If there had been

a "theme" story, or one in which there was a sort of double chief character, then your story may proceed despite the funeral of its best friend. Union or re-union are harbingers of the good ending.

There are three distinct lines along which a plot may be developed: (1) The development of a single Character; (2) the building of a tremendous Situation; (3) the creating of a dynamic Atmosphere.

(EXAMPLE 30.) As an example of (1) Stevenson's "Markheim" is a good illustration; of (2), Poe's "The Pit and the Pendulum," and of (3), "The Fall of the House of Usher," by the same author.

In conclusion, a plot is not a mere series of incidents, but an unbreakable chain of events by means of which the writer swiftly draws his surprising Situation into the reader's presence. If you will prepare the reader subtly for what is to come, by keeping the Climax in abeyance from the first crisis to the last, the whole will seem plausible, altho your story concerns the inhabitants of the farthest star.

The effect of the plot must be carefully studied and planned. When the definite effect

has been chosen, then each incident must be planned with but one thought in view—to heighten that effect, which must be so strong with suggestion as to arouse a corresponding *feeling* in the emotions of the reader.

Fiction is the Fine Art of stringing plain beads of Fact and colored beads of Fancy so that the wire holding them together cannot be seen; the all-important wire is the plot.

CHAPTER XI

The Ten Possible Plot Manifestations

each illustrated by an example

WE shall now endeavor to show that there are but a *few elemental plot manifestations,* or ways of displaying its internal characteristics and evolving a certain type of story thereby. We can think of only ten possible plot manifestations: (1) *The focusing of a dramatic Situation,* or a series of them, culminating in a tremendous Climax; (2) *The presentation of a Problem;* (3) *The planning of an inevitable Tragedy;* (4) *The opposing of environment against character* in the Psychological story; (5) *The nice weaving of idea,* thru fiction, with Moral or Motive; (6) *The creating of the imaginary tale,* or the tale

of Romance; (7) *The delving into the unknown to find the tale of the Occult;* (8) *The building up, by means of a string of incidents,* fraught with danger and peril, *of the exciting Adventure;* (9) *The unravelling of a Mystery;* (10) *The springing of a Surprise.*

Perhaps the greatest master of the Surprise plot was O. Henry (Sidney Porter). The Surprise plot manifestation even is styled "the O. Henry ending."

(EXAMPLE 31.) The ending of "The World and the Door" brings us up with a jerk:—"May I trouble you to ask Mr. Merriam to come out?" she said with a charming smile.

"But, does not the Senora know that Senor Merriam sailed for Panama at three o'clock?"

The reader did not dream of this contingency either!

A Problem is presented in "The Substitute," by Francois Coppée:

(EXAMPLE 32.) Should an old man, imprisoned so often that he is no longer susceptible to crime, substitute himself for a young man who has committed his first offence, and thus maybe save the boy from a life of crime?

As an example of a Mystery plot.

(EXAMPLE 33.) Fitz James O'Brien's "What Was It? A Mystery" answers the purpose: A mysterious being, that may be felt but not seen, is encountered, but never explained.

Next to the problem plot, the Psychological plot is most generally employed by the better writers of to-day.

(EXAMPLE 34.) Mary E. Wilkins, in "A New England Nun," shows the futility of two people, "promised" to each other, but who can never arouse a mutual love for each other, trying to force a mutual passion.

The Moral and the Motive elements in plots often run so closely parallel that it is difficult to say which classification should claim them.

(EXAMPLE 35.) Anthony Hope, in "The House Opposite," would seem to point out the Moral that, all said and done, distance does lend enchantment.

On the other hand, Richard Harding Davis, in "The Exiles," seems to have had in mind the Motive-Idea, that human nature once swung out of its accustomed orbit of environment, seeks its very opposite sphere.

Romance is the truest form of fiction, and requires the most delicate touch of all in the handling.

(EXAMPLE 36.) Kipling begins his great Romance, "The Man Who Would Be King," with the quotation, "Brother to a Prince and fellow to a beggar if he be found worthy." In the same key he pitches the plot: "I greatly fear that my King is dead, and if I want a crown, I must go and hunt it myself." And when, at the very conclusion of the story, he makes the fallen King sing "The Son of Man goes forth to war!" thru his nose, he strikes one of the sublimest chords in all the records of fancy.

The Occult plot is not generally in favor, either among readers or writers. To make it even half-way convincing, it requires considerable skill in the handling.

(EXAMPLE 37.) In "Dr. Heidegger's Experiment," however, Hawthorne has so blended fancy and fact, as to make the beauty of the former strongly suggest the reality of the latter.

Adventure must have the danger note recurring again and again thruout its progress, like the high-pitched shriek of the clarionet in a dramatic score.

(EXAMPLE 38.) "The Adventure of the Speckled Band," by A. Conan Doyle, has a series of suggestive sentences like the following running thru it:

"In a fit of anger he beat his native butler to death . . . suffered a long term of imprisonment . . . a terrible change came over our step-father . . . that fatal night . . . the wild scream of a terrified woman . . . I spring from my bed . . . it was the speckled bands!"

The plot of Dramatic Situation most frequently follows the semi-dramatic form of dialog, employing very little description.

(EXAMPLE 39.) In "The Hypothesis of Failure," O. Henry struck the dramatic note and, altho the story is comedy, it is good comedy. The moment his characters appear they key the situations up to a tenseness that engrosses the reader. Yet this effect depends upon the plot as much as upon the dialog.

Tragedy in a story plot must be planned with the same care exercised in plotting a drama. There must be a keynote of Tragedy from the very first word to the last.

(EXAMPLE 40.) "The Ambitious Guest," by Hawthorne, has the sinister note running thru it: "They dwelt in a cold spot and a dangerous one. . . . With a sound of wailing and lamentation . . . to let people know I lived an honest man and died a Christian."

Herein, then, lies hope eternal for the aspiring writer: Every one of the five elemental plots, outlined in the following chapter, admits of delineation by several, if not all, of the ten plot manifestations just given. And each plot manifestation is capable of innumerable variations. *Plot material is practically inexhaustible.* Therefore, BE ORIGINAL.

Original ideas for stories were exhausted years ago; original plots are inexhaustible.

CHAPTER XII

Plot Genealogy

GOD'S PLOT IN THE BOOK OF CREATION, SHOWING THE RESEMBLANCE OF THE PLOTS FOR ALL NARRATIVES SINCE; THE BASIC PLOT FOR ALL STORIES; THE FIVE ELEMENTAL PLOTS DEDUCED THEREFROM; MAN'S RELATIONSHIPS.

THE statement is often made that there are but a half a dozen or so original plots. This is not exactly correct. It is true that there are but a *few elemental plots,* or plots, which, when stripped stark, bear a certain resemblance of like inherent tendency, discernible by means of microscopical critical instruments, on the part of literary scientists.

It does not come amiss, at this point, to draw a practical analogy, that has proved a pregnant source of plot inspiration to many.

The whole human race, for instance, is the

result of a *single plot of God*. But what infinite variety! There are millions of us human beings, each with exactly 288—or something like that number—bones, a soul, a mind, etc. Every one of us alike in one particular, and *different in a thousand others*. The further divisions of this grand plot of the Creator should serve as the only model for you and me—creators on a small scale—for therein lies a blood relationship to the elemental sources of all plots ever since the world began.

Genesis, the Book of Creation, lays bare God's plot of Man, and, not strangely either, it is the plot of man and man only that we writers are still and ever will be concerned with.

The plot that shall always hold first place, and indeed never fail to be absorbingly interesting, in the Book of Creation and elsewhere, is that of the *Division of the Sexes!* Man and woman, their struggle for supremacy, their loves, their union, their children, their separation—here is the *elemental plot source* of nine hundred stories out of every thousand.

The next place of importance among God's plots, we give to the *Introduction of Evil* into a world unable otherwise to appreciate happiness and contentment. Added to this, is the minor theme of *Man's Free Will,* which —if one may be pardoned a bit of levity to illustrate a point—played the deuce in Eden, in the episode of Eve and the Serpent, reached a bloody Climax in the slaying of Abel, and has been raising Cain ever since. But how interesting it has made the Story of Man!

The next important elemental plot phase resulted from the dissemination of mankind over the face of the earth, resulting in the *Distinction of Race.* Rebellion, Revolution and War, together with internecine, racial and family strifes, the results, have inspired epic tales from "The Siege of Troy" to "The Siege of Berlin."

The fourth great original plot agency is man's regard for the *Welfare of his Soul.* In Old Testament times, Revealed Religion held first place of interest. In this Twentieth Century, however, it has been relegated to the last rank. Its place is usurped frequently by

the more modern forms of belief, such as Christian Science, Spiritualism, New Thought and Theosophy.

Thus we see that the creator of fiction has but to fashion his story plans after those of the Creator of the Universe.

Bear in mind, that the basic plot germ of every story is MAN. From this *sole basic plot germ,* we derive the *four elemental plots* that furnish general plots for all the stories in the world.

The enumeration of *Mans' Relationships,* in the order of their present-day importance, will reveal their possibilities as short-story plot matter:

(EXAMPLE 41.) Man's Relations With Woman. From which are derived stories of Love, Married Life, Children, Jealousy, Infelicity, Divorce, Romantic Love, the Suffragette, the Spinster, etc.

2. Man's Relations With the Devil. From which are derived stories of Hate, Crime, Sin, Sorrow etc.

3. Man's Relations With His People. From Which are derived stories of Race, Color, Slave, War, Invasion, Feud, Strife, etc.

4. Man's Relations With His God. From which are derived stories of Religion; Jew vs. Gentile; Moor vs. Catholic; Legends of the Church; Conversion, Regeneration, Christmas, etc.

To these four elemental plot themes a fifth might be added:

(EXAMPLE 42.) 5. Man's Interpretation of the stories of Fantasy, Mystery, the Occult, the Psychic, Unreal and the Unknown. From which are derived Romance, etc.

The divisions of sources and classifications after this might be called *General Plots*. They are many in number, but of inestimable value to the serious builder of plots. We shall devote a separate chapter to their consideration.

Any Plot that is ready to conform to the three absolute Laws of the Modern Short Story—Progressive Incident, Situation-Climax and Completed Action—is free to choose whoever, whenever, whatever, however it pleases from all the wide realms of Fact and Fancy.

CHAPTER XIII

Classifications and Variations of Plot*

A CATEGORICAL CLASSIFICATION AND COMPREHENSIVE CATALOG OF PLOT MATERIAL

THE following Plot Catalog should be of vast service to the serious-minded writer, both as a many-sided stimulant to new ideas, as well as a comprehensive and convenient index to his store of plots.

A careful study of the category will reveal that the subjects and their sub-divisions are

*For an inexhaustible study of this phase of plot, the reader is referred to "The Universal Plot Catalog," by Henry Albert Phillips. (Published by The Home Correspondence School, Springfield, Mass. $1.25 net.)

progressive in a marked degree; one leading by a natural process of evolution, into the other.

(EXAMPLE 43.) Women Romance (Marriage) —Children—Family—etc. MAN is taken for granted thruout. The category is in fact nothing more than a detailed enumeration of Relationships, Experiences and Investigations. The main divisions—indicated by numerals and printed in capital letters—catalog the elemental subjects of Man's Relationships (associations) and Investigations. The sub-divisions indicated by the letters of the alphabet in parentheses, and printed in lower case—represent Man's Experience in these Relationships. The former is the suggestion of the Theme; the latter the kernel of the Story.

CLASSIFIED PLOT CATEGORY

1.—*The Heart of Man—Man's Relations with Woman*

1. WOMEN
   - (a) girl
   - (b) mother
   - (c) spinster
   - (d) suffragette
   - (e) motherhood
   - (f) wage earner

2. ROMANCE (Love)
   - (a) love
   - (b) courtship
   - (c) marriage
   - (d) rejection
   - (e) disappointment
   - (f) separation

3. CHILDREN
   (a) baby
   (b) boy
   (c) girl
   (d) heroes
   (e) adventure
   (f) foundling
   (g) lost child
   (h) innocence

4. FAMILY
   (a) felicity
   (b) fidelity
   (c) intrigue
   (d) peace
   (e) sacrifice
   (f) struggle
   (g) feud
   (h) ancestry

5. SEPARATION
   (a) infelicity
   (b) unfaithfulness
   (c) dissension
   (d) scandal
   (e) divorce
   (f) family - in - law (butts in)
   (g) old love flames again

6. RE-UNION
   (a) parent & child
   (b) husband & wife
   (c) family
   (d) lovers

When Man has become a *pater familias,* his Ambition becomes fired and he assumes a new attitude toward his fellow-man. He and his family become an isolated unit in his country

or community. His first ambition is for the preservation and advancement of his Home. his second is for the preservation and advancement of his Country.

2.—The Ambition of Man—Man's Relations with His People.

7. AMBITION
   - (a) for self
   - (b) for "name"
   - (c) for fame
   - (d) for money
   - (e) for family
   - (f) wife's selfish
   - (g) political
   - (h) pride
   - (i) vanity
   - (j) aspirations

8. SUCCESS
   - (a) uplifting
   - (b) degrading
   - (c) munificence
   - (d) stinginess
   - (e) the cost
   - (f) luck

9. FAILURE
   - (a) loyalty of friends
   - (b) deserted
   - (c) broken heart
   - (d) changes character

10. POLITICS
    - (a) ambition
    - (b) "crooked"
    - (c) struggle
    - (d) power of

11. PATRIOTISM
    (a) love of country
    (b) sacrifice of Family
    (c) fanatical
    (d) magnetic leader
    (e) woman's part
    (f) soldier
    (g) hero
    (h) coward
    (i) spy

12. WAR
    (a) feud
    (b) internecine
    (c) revolution
    (d) race
    (e) mob (riot)
    (f) faction
    (g) invasion
    (h) massacre
    (i) religious
    (j) Red Cross

13. SUBJUGATION
    (a) captive
    (b) prison
    (c) slave
    (d) serf
    (e) exile
    (f) execution

14. STATION
    (a) ruler
    (b) vassal
    (c) hireling
    (d) outcast
    (e) derelict
    (f) servant

When Man is not actively engaged in the violent exercise of his Ambition, or perhaps after he has gratified in some measure his restless spirit, he will settle down to enjoy the

luxuries that conquest has placed within his grasp. To give pleasure to the flesh, Man often will rob his soul!

3.—The Body of Man—Man's Relations with the Devil.

15. MONEY
    (a) plutocrat
    (b) miser
    (c) parvenu
    (d) beggar
    (e) tramp
    (f) luck
    (g) lost fortune
    (h) buried treasure

16. DISEASE
    (a) insanity
    (b) heredity
    (c) blindness
    (d) old age
    (e) insomnia
    (f) drunkenness
    (g) drugs
    (h) unrest
    (i) regeneration
    (j) incurable

17. DERANGEMENT
    (a) ambition
    (b) fanatic
    (c) eccentricity
    (d) "character"
    (e) freak
    (f) fantasy
    (g) poet
    (h) aphasia
    (i) hatred
    (j) deceit
    (k) jealousy
    (l) age

18. CRIME

(a) thief
(b) burglar
(c) counterfeiter
(d) forger
(e) kidnapper
(f) murderer
(g) prison
(h) convict
(i) plagiarist
(j) rogue
(k) double life
(l) gossip
(m) mystery
(n) detective

19. DEATH

(a) by error
(b) by accident
(c) by fire
(d) by water
(e) by battle
(f) by poison
(g) by suicide
(h) vicarious
(i) heroes
(j) adventure

20. POST MORTEM

(a) burial
(b) will
(c) mystery
(d) heirs

We have followed the career of Man from luxury to disease and to its logical sequence, Derangement. Crime is usually the next step. "The wages of sin is Death." Burial follows. And Death brings Man face to face with the Welfare of his Soul.

4.—*The Soul of Man—Man's Relations with His God.*

21. RELIGION
- (a) revelation
- (b) inspiration
- (c) vision
- (d) renunciation
- (e) regeneration
- (f) penance

22. FANATICS
- (a) holy war
- (b) monastic
- (c) Jew vs. Gentile
- (d) Moor vs. Catholic
- (e) missionary
- (f) persecution
- (g) Spiritualists
- (h) wild sects
- (i) Inquisition
- (j) martyrs

23. ROMANCE
- (a) legends
- (b) missionaries
- (c) Knights Templars
- (d) miracles

Having probed into all the Experiences of Man, we arrive at the very portal of the Unreal and the Unknown, about which we conjecture, investigate and interpret, each to his own fancy, and within the limits of his imagination.

5.—*The Mind of Man—Man's Interpretation of the Unreal and the Unknown.*

24. PSYCHIC
- (a) occult
- (b) mystery

25. SUPERSTITION
- (a) ghosts
- (b) haunted house
- (c) hoodoo
- (d) evil portents
- (e) dreams
- (f) "13"

26. SUGGESTION
- (a) hypnotism
- (b) mental domination
- (c) fear
- (d) men are like sheep
- (e) panic
- (f) auto-

27. CHARLATANISM
- (a) Oriental
- (b) magic
- (c) "healers"
- (d) "prophets"
- (e) cults
- (f) astrologers
- (g) crystal gazers
- (h) palmists

Our plot investigation must proceed one step farther. There are certain *abstract* forces that act thru Man, rather than that Man acts

thru them. There are likewise a few abstract problems, the working out of which in fiction employ Man almost in the capacity of a dummy. And there is the whole field of personification, where anything, from a toad to a tree, is made to assume the attributes of Man. And, last of all, there is a miscellaneous list of plot material that will become more effectual if classified as such.

To repeat, *the basic plot germ of every story is MAN*. If you write about trees, mountains, the sea, animals, or anything not Man, you must personify them, humanize them, and give them the emotions, the language and the careers of mankind. The denizens of nature, or things inanimate, written about from any other point of view, are distinctly not story *characters* and cannot be utilized for fiction purposes, except as incidental fixtures of scene and setting. Nature and the Elements sometimes are made to take prominent parts as vehicles of Atmosphere.

28. NATURE AND THE ELEMENTS

(a) desert
(b) mountains
(c) sea
(d) storms

29. PERSONIFICATION

(a) bird
(b) dog
(c) horse
(d) house
(e) tree
(f) river

We will get plot material now and then that is more or less abstract and which nicely fits under the indefinite classification of

30. PROBLEMS

(a) law
(b) race
(c) labor
(d) science
(e) business
(f) social

A brand new field has been opened up in this, the Twentieth Century, which will command a classification of its own:

31. AVIATION

(a) adventure
(b) accident
(c) romance
(d) contest

32. WIRELESS

(a) rescue
(b) heroism

There are many themes to be picked up, which while not abstract, yet they seem to be out of place wherever tried. For their benefit, a classification may be opened for them, called

33. MISCELLANEOUS

(a) allegory
(b) horror
(c) historic
(d) honor
(e) adventure
(f) heroes
(g) mystery
(h) myths

The plot material suggested has been, without exception, of a serious nature, so that a department must be provided for

34. HUMOROUS

(a) mistaken identity
(b) character
(c) farce
(d) burlesque
(e) dialect
(f) situation
(g) jokes

And, finally, you will pick up *episodes,* that are in themselves excellent plot germs, or the kernels of splendid situations, or bits of local color. These are put in the last classification.

35. FRAGMENTS

After this searching analysis and comprehensive catalog of the fertile realm of the plot, the student cannot choose but be optimistic, no matter how sterile his efforts in this department of story-writing have been here-

tofore. Plots are as many as the stars of heaven! And in the published story are they like stars, in truth: some being barely discernible to the naked eye of the reader; others we may see shedding the faintest twinkle in a story; but a few are so remarkable in their effulgence, that for a time they may cause the eyes of a whole reading hemisphere to be lifted heavenward! Blessed are the authors of those stories!

Be original!

Plot germs are as contagious, as plentiful, and as potential, as any other germs. But our mind must be in a "receptive" condition to "catch" them.

CHAPTER XIV

Practical Plot Sources

EMPLOYMENT OF FACTS; THE DAILY NEWSPAPER; PREGNANT PARAGRAPHS; FERTILE PHRASES; USE OF FICTION; GENERAL READING; OBSERVATION; DANGERS; PROPRIETY; ORIGINALITY.

AS we have made clear in a previous chapter, a plot can enter the mind but in one form—as a fact-germ. And as is true of germs in general, that germ must be a vital, *living*, organic, infectious particle. Dead, inert, inanimate masses, or still life as such, are not fit candidates for fictional honors. Anything that must lie still, or that cannot move, and calls forth the *reader's active* labor to dissect or analyze it, is an excellent theme for an

essay, a thesis, a biography, or one of the many non-fiction forms. But in fiction the plot alone is active, germinating, stimulating, motivating. The reader demands that his mind remain *passive;* he has sought *entertainment* in fiction, and he has paid for it. He asks simply that his emotions be thrilled, soothed, gratified.

Remember, that short-story fiction is selfish in its demands on its plot material. Daily life is full of dull routine and monotonous detail. But fiction is contrary to actual life, in that it picks and chooses the events it needs for its purposes, magnifying and isolating them. There must be a keynote of *human interest,* of a vital relationship of MAN, in all plot material. In setting down plot matter, make use of significant details only. You must get infinitely more out of your material than you find there, making the original facts unrecognizable thru the employment of fertile fancy.

In employing facts to any large degree, the writer will encounter danger in two particulars: The more *commonplace* the material, the more subtle the art required to make it

attractive as a story; the more *extraordinary* the fact-material, the greater the tact necessary to make it seem plausibly real.

(EXAMPLE 44.) In 1898, Morgan Robertson wrote a story of a marine disaster that was considered by the many editors who rejected it, the biggest bit of improbability that could possibly be fictionized. Mr. Robertson was, in part, responsible for this adverse judgment, because the story undoubtedly contained too much fact and too little fiction. He should have made a premise in the very beginning of the story-plot, which would have warped the entire contingent matter out of the region of fact altogether. Then he would have been free to exercise his fancy freely and not stick to the facts. To illustrate how closely Mr. Robertson followed actuality, this story proved to be a perfect replica of that told by eye-witnesses of the sinking of the "Titanic"—fourteen years later! It read like a newspaper account of that terrible sea tragedy, in every detail. The aged MS. was dug up and sent out immediately, and sold. It was bought more because it was such a remarkable phenomenon, or freak, rather than for its fiction value, and was published by a prominent New York newspaper.

Fictionize your facts before you employ them!

De Maupassant culled most of his plot material from the daily newspaper. Let us consider that as a source of plots.

There are at least two plots in the columns of every "yellow journal"; and at least *one*

plot in every two conservative papers you may happen to scan thru. The reason for the former having such a large percentage, is because its contents leans more towards fiction than fact! Newspapers do not furnish complete plots. But they never fail to contain excellent plot germs, brilliant local color, sordid or silken setting, and a host of profitable ideas.

(EXAMPLE 45.) De Maupassant probably obtained the germ for his story, "The Coward," from some such item as this:

COUNT . . . A SUICIDE
ON THE EVE OF HIS DUEL

There he stopped reading; his imagination conceived the rest. "A Piece of String," was no doubt evolved in the same manner.

Bearing in mind the formula, to seek your Climax the moment you get down to work on your plot germ, it becomes an easy matter to proceed in gathering material from the press, because the first line is the Climax, the kernel of the plot.

(EXAMPLE 46.) Here is an actual heading taken from a "yellow":

"BRING BACK PAPA"
THREE CHILDREN'S APPEAL TO SANTA
We have the germ of a splendid Christmas story!

The question of "originality" rises. Suppose others choose the same news clipping? In answer to this, it may be said that not two persons in a thousand, employing the identical plot germ, will take the same point of view, will assume the same mood, will employ the same plot development or choose the same plot manifestation. You might place the above plot under the classification: FAMILY—feud. I may classify it: PATRIOTISM—spy. Another writer will have it under CRIME—counterfeiter. Or RELIGION—Christmas; CHARLATANISM—"healer"; NATURE — storms; PROBLEMS — race; AVIATION — adventure; MISCELLANEOUS—allegory.

Thus it is seen that there is infinite variety. Try to be original without being bizarre.

If a marvelous story plot is found in the heading of a newspaper, should it be cast to the winds, simply because someone else has seen it too? True originality consists in doing the much-done thing in *a new way*. Be sure that you are not trite, then go ahead.

The newspaper is responsible for a large proportion of the greatest short stories.

(EXAMPLE 47.) Here is a clipping from a conservative paper:

FIGHT TO THE DEATH
IN A DARK CELLAR
Two Night Watchmen Begin with
Fists and Finally Take
Their Revolvers
Survivor Sits Down Near the Body
of his Victim and Writes
an Account of It

There is your realistic story done to a turn. How many writers would choose the same motive for the fight, or the same details of the struggle?

Begin at once, then, to follow the headings of the daily paper. Clip every item that seems of fiction value. That is your business as a writer of fiction—you must constantly be storing up energy. Develop the "fiction habit" in all your five senses; better still, create a sixth, and call it the Sense of Fiction.

There are little tragedies, romances and dramas constantly transpiring in the circles of people with whom we come in daily contact. But herein lies grave danger. If you would appropriate them, more than a mere change of scene, character and setting is necessary. The actual, intimate happening must, if em-

ployed at all, form only an episode in *another story*. A failure to observe this has led to broken friendships. Grief and even tragedies have followed the ruthless disclosure of sacred facts. The newspaper reporter does his work in this fashion and too often supplies his paper with facts bought with tears.

The discriminating and artistic plotter, however, may so disguise facts and actual circumstances as to make the resultant story a total stranger to the original incident. The best way to effect this, is to see that the *motive* of your plot is not the same motive as that underlying the happening upon which it is based.

(EXAMPLE 48.) You may be acquainted with the facts from real life—wherein a girl is brutally jilted and the man who jilts her marries another girl and seems happy.

To write a story bringing in those facts as they actually happened, would be more than brutal. Yet there is a way of writing a story *based on* these facts.

(EXAMPLE 49.) A girl (in an entirely different sphere of life) is not accepted by the man of her choice . . . She later drifts accidentally into a vocation that gives her unending pleasure and half

heals the wound in her heart. . . . She works up to a foremost place in the affairs of the community. . . . She and the man meet occasionally. . . He has lost all the money he had married the other woman for. . . . The jilted woman is able to give him jobs now and then (unawares) that keep him and his wife from starvation.

But in these semi-personal matters, *be careful.*

May a writer, with perfect propriety, on reading the story of another, make use of any idea—not a part of the specific plot—that the said story suggests?

Why not? For ideas arising in our own brains are unalterably ours, whether stimulated by the thoughts, or idea, or plot of another or not. The specific story-plot is inviolably the property of the author of the specific story of which it forms the motive. Elemental plots are common property.

(EXAMPLE 50.) A writer reads a magazine story in which occurs the single sentence, "The village that never was." This sentence starts a train of thought that asks repeatedly, why not "The man that never was?" The result was an actual story bearing that title. The story was sold in America and in England, and proved to be one of the best of the author's production.

The above actual happening was perfectly legitimate.

While reading a masterpiece of short-story writing, every true-born writer should be inspired with fertile ideas of his own, or where is his claim to imagination? In fact, some of our greatest writers have palpably turned into great stories the ideas that inspired them while reading the masterpiece of another.

(EXAMPLE 51) Did Balzac get his idea for "La Grande Breteche" from Boccaccio? Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado" has the same basic plot. Edith Wharton, too, has made use of it!

To the wide-awake author and plot hunter, general reading offers a prolific field.

(EXAMPLE 52.) A writer perusing a book on early French History was struck by a reference to the psychological effect of a prolonged sojourn among the sands of the desert, on a man's character. He became obsessed with a resultant story-plot, of a monk in a monastery situated on the edge of a desert. A Moor has sworn to make the monk violate his sacred vows and, working in conjunction with the psychological effect of the desert, he succeeds. (This story is "Flesh," by Rex Beach, which appeared late in 1911, in "The Monthly Magazine Section.")

History teems with material.

(EXAMPLE 53.) How many stories has the romantic career of Francois Villon inspired? Stevenson's "A Lodging For the Night," surely, not to mention the play by McCarthy, "If I Were King," and countless short stories and poems.

Science furnishes hundreds of plot germs. *(EXAMPLE 54.) The phonograph, the dictaphone, the airplane, wireless telegraphy and telephony, are supplying the fields of romance, adventure and detective tales. The scientific detective stories of Messrs. Balmer and McHarg that appeared during 1910-11, were sugggested by actually accomplished scientific inventions.*

Observation is an asset common to all. And by observation is meant something more than merely *seeing* an object or witnessing an action. It means hearing, seeing and *feeling* the merest incident and, most of all, being able to construct from it a vital motive, or plot.

Observation and the newspaper are obviously the groundwork for most of O. Henry's stories. How else could the realistic writers obtain their plots?

There are those authors gifted with high imaginative powers, who evolve their plots almost altogether from titles. That is, they get their title first. They make that their plot germ, and then "work up" their plot.

(EXAMPLE 55.) Say that the attractive title, "The Protection of the Wall," is chosen. The writer then would set about to evolve a plot something like this skeleton:

"Boy who has always gone his own wild ways in the face of his mother's opposition . . . the day ar-

rives, after he has become a man, that brings upon him the crisis of his life . . . in his moment of trial he flees to the protection of the wall—his mother—now his only refuge. Like a wall she shelters him and sustains the brunt of the storm."

Thus it is shown that the aspiring author is in no sense restricted as to sources of plot material. But there is one thing that he must do, if he hopes to profit by the endless opportunities within his reach—*he must be diligent in gathering material and punctilious in setting it down as near as possible to the time it presents itself.*

So—and so only—can he hope to have it stored up against the psychological moment of need.

Memory is but a morgue, haunted by the ghosts of yesterday's experiences and ideas. . . . Set down your plot-ideas today, while they are warm with life and feeling, and they may live forever!

CHAPTER XV

A Store-House Full of Plots

A NOVEL METHOD OF STORING A PRACTICALLY INEXHAUSTIBLE SUPPLY OF PLOTS; THE IMPORTANCE OF TAKING NOTES; HOW TO TAKE NOTES; HOW TO KEEP THEM SYSTEMATICALLY.

THERE are substantial reasons for regarding the present chapter as the most practical, if not the most important, in the entire work. Carrying out its injunctions implies a mastery of the principles contained in those preceding it, and insures a quantity of ready-to-use plots systematically arranged in a manner that reveals their full potentiality from every point of view.

The Artist-Painter considers it a part of his vocation—independent of that ethereal aid, Genius—to have at hand an equipment. More than a brush and a clean canvass is necessary. He must have pencil, brushes, palette, colors, oils, etc., in addition to skill of execution.

The Artist-Writer must be equipped with more than pen and paper, and talent. To obtain the maximum of outpouring he should have a definite *inpouring* of forces that contribute to the *inspiration, association and suggestion of ideas.* And if he has the perfect equipment on hand, he may sit down ready to take up a new plot without an idea, so to speak, in his head.

The perfect equipment consists chiefly of notes and plot books, which he must have begun to prepare months, if not years, before. A writer with his perfect equipment need never despair of plots, and no writer under the canopy need despair of the perfect equipment if he will set about the task NOW and keep at it.

In the first place, nothing that is *striking,* that rivets the attention of yourself or others

for an instant, is too insignificant for your notebook. A word, a gesture, a sound, a scene that starts the emotion, that holds the interest or that rouses action in men, are the tricks of your trade. Make notes of them *now*. Do not think, for an instant, that you will be able to remember them at some future time, when you come to write a story. That is preposterous.

In the second place, there will come to your mind rare flashes of inspiration, that, like the heaven-sent manna of the Hebrews, must be gathered while the dew is still fresh upon it! Note them down. Exercise inspiration and it will grow; ignore it and it will cease its visitations.

Now the taking of notes does not necessarily mean the getting-up out of bed at midnight or the writing them down on your cuff every time you attend a dinner party. It means, rather, the application of not more than two hours' time a week—about twenty minutes a day, on an average—to storing up energy!

Let us take the case of a practical author who employs this method:

He has been garnering material let us say for four years. During that period he has gathered about *fifteen hundred plots* and plot *germs!* One thousand of these are newspaper plot germs; five hundred are complete plots from a great variety of sources. In addition to this, he has collected and conceived *two thousand titles.* Two-thirds of these he judges to be excellent plot germs. He has likewise a list of possible dramatic *situations;* snatches of effective dialog; unique, humorous and dynamic phrases.

Let us examine his methods.

He reads the daily paper first, then he goes thru it again for plots. His is a most conservative paper, yet a single day's news yielded the following rich pickings:

(EXAMPLE 56.) HIS LOOKS WIN A FORTUNE, Laborer is left $200,000 by Widow, etc.

MARRIED BY A BLUNDER, etc.

THIS TROUT FED ON JEWELS, Diamonds and a Platinum Chain, etc.

THOUGHT WAVES AND CRIME, Crank's Theory Upheld, etc.

Some weeks, from all sources, he adds 25 plots to his store; other weeks he gets but one or two. At the dinner table he was surprised to learn that when a man is executed by being shot, one musket is left unloaded.

(EXAMPLE 57.) A plot was the result of this discovery: "Each man then thinks himself innocent of the death of comrade . . . man might be detailed to shoot his own son and beg for empty gun . . . console himself that he did not do the killing . . . then find the smoking shell!"

Every book that he reads he seeks legitimate inspiration from. He has the plot habit.

(EXAMPLE 58.) While reading "Macbeth," it struck him that the episode of Lady Macbeth and the bloody blade might be the basis for a modern detective tale: "Murderer's knife might be placed in the hand of a sleeping woman who walks red-handed into the arms of the Law! By deduction this innocent victim is freed."

The sinking of the *Titanic* so inflamed his imagination that half a dozen plot germs resulted.

He was walking along the street one evening and saw an old lady looking anxiously out of a window. He hurried home.

(EXAMPLE 59.) The result and plot ran something like this: "An old lady has waited 30 years for the return of her boy . . . strange young man resolves to visit and comfort her . . . she thinks it her boy . . . he, knowing that it would kill her to disillusion her, acts out the part.

He hears remarks, rumors, stories, gossip, anecdotes, scandal, and then, *ignoring their intrinsic value and intuitively utilizing their fiction value,* he puts them in the books that he would not take thousands of dollars for.

Whenever he reads a book—about one a month—he keeps a pencil in hand. When he reads a striking thought or sentence, he puts a tiny dot opposite the line *without even pausing.* When he has finished the book, he quickly thumbs thru it, and culls the desired sentences. There may be six; sometimes forty, seldom more. He puts these pregnant phrases into his lists of Titles. There are usually one or two of them that suggest plots, which he writes out then and there. He does everything *on the spot.*

(EXAMPLE 60.) Here are a few of the "titles": The Picture That Faded, Certainly Not!, When A Man Cannot Pay, Wait! Somebody Had To Do It, Coming Events, The Duplicate Key, To Those That Have, A Moment of Uncertainty, The Potential Mother, The Flame That Went Out.

For the latter two he had immediate ideas for plots:

(EXAMPLE 61.) "The Potential Mother,"—The Feminist Question and its deleterious effects on the home, the family and the theory of posterity.

"The Flame That Went Out,"—Have a marriage deferred . . . in the interim man (or woman) goes insane for some cause traceable to the other.

Poetry teems with title-phrases:

(EXAMPLE 62.) The rather trite phrase, "Hope deferred," in Pope's poem, met a plot response in his mind on the instant: "Have simple pair raise a large family in great hope, and live to see them, one by one, go off to new alliances . . . ready to die of despair. . . . Climax when one of (the eight) does honor to all and brings prosperity to their old parents."

His method of procedure in recording these plots and other data is simple. In the first place, he folds a sheet of typewriter paper and tears it in half. He writes each plot germ, episode or plot skeleton on a single piece of paper, numbering it and putting the date at the bottom. In the case of Titles it will hold about thirty.

Next, he buys loose-leaf books, about 3 x 6 inches. They hold about 75 pages. The plots are copied by the typewriter on these pages. The titles are arranged alphabetically.

He faithfully employs the plot classification as briefly outlined in Chapter XIV.* At present he has many neat, leather-bound volumes.

(EXAMPLE 63.) Vol. I—THE HEART OF MAN; Vol. II—THE AMBITION OF MAN; Vol. III—THE BODY OF MAN; Vol. IV—THE SOUL OF MAN; Vol. V—THE MIND OF MAN; Vol. VI — MISCELLANEOUS; Vol. VII — TITLES AND SELECTED PLOTS. Instead of letters as index, there are bits of paper lettered according to the divisions and sub-divisions in the category.

Every writer may do the same as this writer has done. Every writer can do it, and should do it. It does not make the work formal, cut-and-dried and hackneyed. On the contrary, the man who has a wealth of plots on hand, will choose the one he thinks is the best, or the one he thinks his mood at the time is best fitted to elaborate.

The writer with a single plot—or worse, ready to seize frantically on the first germ that offers itself—has no choice.

In concluding, we take it for granted that the readers of these pages are in dead earnest.

*The cataloging and filing systems are continued to a practical end with the aid of "The Universal Plot Catalog" and "The Phillips Automatic Plot File."

That they mean to write in the best manner they know how and are willing to spare no pains both in acquiring helpful knowledge and materials, and in devoting a daily modicum of time and labor to that end.

This book is not intended merely to exemplify a theory, but to outline and urge an intelligent *practice* of the technique of the Modern Short Story. It is based on the painstaking examination and study of the best stories of the best writers, and a practical exercise of the knowledge thus obtained, in the writing of stories that met with publication. Furthermore, an earnest effort is made to throw some new light on the plot of the Short Story, and its acquisition, that will be of practical value to all classes of writers who accept it in the spirit in which it has been written.

The way to make rules really valuable, is to thoroly learn them, then literally forget them by perfectly practicing them.

CHAPTER XVI

A Practical Demonstration in Plot Building

HOW A PLOT IS CONCEIVED AND CARRIED THRU EVERY PROCESS

THERE remains but one vital point for us to consider in the building of plots—which is to go ahead and build an actual plot right in plain sight. Up to this point, our examples have been, in the main, synthetical. Our endeavor has been to *teach how to build up*. It does not require any special knowledge —merely the exercise of our inborn destructiveness—to tear down.

After we have built our plot, we will examine how, where and when its motivating power became operative in creating movement, suspense and situation.

Let us assume that the author of our pro-

posed story has merely arrived at the point where he has determined to write a story. He has not a single specific idea as to either a particular plot or a definite kind of a story. He is obsessed by no particular mood. All that he knows is that he is going to write a story.

He is not in a tremendous hurry, so he elects to look over his General plots first, in the hope of finding inspiration, or perhaps some golden episode, plot germ or plot, that he had missed in weeding out for Special plots for immediate consideration. A perusal of fifty plots yields no inspiration. At length he turns to a title (titles are given to every plot or germ the moment it is recorded), "The Long Bow," that starts a train of thought. The contingent plot matter contains nothing startling. It interests him, however:

(EXAMPLE 64.) "The Long Bow. Miss B——, the girl I met one evening at Grahams' . . . Weird sort of a creature . . . the way she draws the long bow, or spins yarns! . . . sort of a Munchausen . . interesting girl, tho . . . has a way about her that almost excites pity tho."

There is a reminiscent power to this germ that throws him into a *mood*. And there he

stops, because he knows that he has *the* plot germ, out of which he will either get his complete plot and write his story; or which he will later discard as hopeless.

He begins his task by trying to build up the germ along the line of a light love romance:

(EXAMPLE 65.) A man meets a young and beautiful girl . . . above all it is her wonderful way of telling things that makes him enamored of her . . . he believes her stories, of course . . . when they are married, he is disillusioned . . . she is nothing but an unvarnished liar!

But there is a bad ending. He does not want a bad ending; that kind of a story won't stand for it. And, after all, he is not in a mood to write that sort of a story, because after all, her character has become so real that he is sorry for her; he wants an "explanation" that will command the readers' solicitude. Altho he does not believe a word the girl of his brain tells him, yet he does believe *in* her. Already she has aroused an emotional interest. He is ready to defend her.

Our author now knows that is *the* story. For, when the true writer becomes obsessed, he can write nothing else to perfection until he has got the obsession out of his system.

But he is stuck. His mind revolves in a vicious circle around the one plot manifestation. He spends half an afternoon wrestling with the single idea. He seeks inspiration in reading. He reads a story that saddens him and throws him still more off the track of the light romance. He is discouraged. He is almost on the point of discarding the plot germ altogether. In a moment of self-disgust he picks up his book of newspaper plots. He is looking for nothing in particular, when under "3.—The Body of Man; 16, DISEASE (g) drugs," his eye halts at this newspaper clipping:

(EXAMPLE 66.) SEARCHED WORLD FOR MORPHINE CURE—Dr. Keeler and Woman—Both Drug Users—Caught After Long Chase For Swindling.

Our author may be imagined as jumping up with a whoop. Here is the plot supplement. Morphine His imagination is inflamed, and in ten minutes he has worked out this plot skeleton:

(EXAMPLE 67.) "The Long Bow," . . . Margaret, who deceives all her friends . . . a visionary and worse . . . is finally discovered taking a dope pill . . . people, community, friends, relatives, in

family where Margaret lives, decides to go to Margaret's town . . . they find even that non-existent . . . a figment of her brain . . . they feel as if a cataclysm has wiped out a community of friends . . . when they return to the house, Margaret is gone, and all they find in her room is a hypodermic and complete dope outfit . . . she and her village never again heard of, but always spoken of with reverence as of honored dead.

At last the plot germ has been developed into a plot skeleton. But the skeleton is crude, and the writer must set to work to look for and find his Climax and then proceed to thresh out all the difficulties.

What will the strongest Climax be? Why not have it the disclosure of the girl's deceit? Then that disclosure must be artfully *concealed,* and the reader thrown off the track. There is the Climax, and he sets out to build accordingly.

He does not like his heroine's name—Margaret. It is too substantial for her character. He scans thru his lists of a hundred or more "temperamental names" and picks out that of Muriel.

The title does not suit the story. He wants one that will help to delude the reader; one that will sound the dismal keynote of the story

and one that the story will be part and parcel of. He works the rest of the afternoon over that, coming off triumphant with "Arden—The Village of Despair." This title gives him a quantity of new inspiration.

The next morning he sets about the important task of building his plot scenario.

The first step is to choose that one of the ten possible plot manifestations best suited to the effect in mind. He is in a quandary whether to make it (1) Focusing a dramatic Situation, culminating in a tremendous Climax; or (9) Unravelling a Mystery; or (10) Springing a Surprise. He chooses (1) as the primary motive, and (9) and (10) as secondary motives.

Next comes the question of what "person" shall tell the story. He decides that the heroine must be disposed of, in a sense, before the opening of the story, in order to best deceive the reader. For this purpose the story told in the first person, by someone deeply affected by the tragedy, will produce the desired effect. He is ready to begin his scenario, which when finished is like this:

(EXAMPLE 68.) (1) Introduce narrator of tale formally . . . a broken old man sitting by his cold fireplace . . . a subject of neighborhood gossip at which he now rebels and tells the tragic tale. . . the avowed purpose for this "introduction" is to give setting, key the atmosphere and avoid future explanations.

(2) Actual story of years before begins . . . Andrew Fraling's mother dying . . goes for the doctor, in the stormy night, who refuses to come . . . there is a mysterious girl at the doctor's, a daughter of a former school mate! . . . weird creature accompanies Fraling to his mother's bedside.

(3) The mother did not die . . . the girl exerted a mysterious influence upon her . . . Muriel's presence meant mother's life; her absence, death. .

(4) Fraling falls in love with her and decides that to marry her will solve the difficulty for all concerned.

(5) He proposes marriage . . . the girl strangely horrified . . . repels him . . . he shocked.

(6) In a moment of indecision that she shows, he kisses her . . . she throws him off as if stung . . . the encounter discloses bruises on her arm . . . he thinks he sees it all now . . . there is someone else who maltreats her.

(7) She demands that he wait one day and she will honestly put her love for him and that for another to the test.

(8) She decides in favor of the other "love."

(9) Her tales of Arden begin . . . Andrew thinks that he sees where all the trouble lies.

(10) The girl grows worse and worse . . . Andrew nurses his half-broken heart with growing rage against Arden . . . she speaks of a man there . . . night after night she tells wilder tales.

(11) The girl's condition becomes alarming . . . she paces the floor all night.

(12) Andrew goes out one terrible night to try to think what to do . . . he returns determined to go to Arden in the morning and kill her persecutor if necessary.

(13) He meets Muriel rushing out into the night, wild and dishevelled . . . she forbids him to follow . . . but he knows that she is going to Arden.

(14) In the morning she had not returned . . . the mother was again practically dying.

(15) He sets out for Arden . . . he knows every foot of the way from her descriptions. . . . "It is the village just behind the hill!" she had said a hundred times.

(16) He arrives at the hill . . . there is no village behind the hill! There never was!

(17) Half-crazed, he looks again and sees the black bag that had never been absent from her wrist. . . . fearfully he shoves his hand into it, looking for some message.

(18) His fingers come in contact with a cold cylinder of metal and some vials . . . he draws one out . . . under a skull and cross bones is the one word—

(19) (Climax, Denouement and Conclusion in one) Morphine!

It will be noted how widely different the plot skeleton is from the plot germ. Oftentimes, as wide a divergence takes place again in the elaboration of the plot scenario thru the Narration. The story itself reveals the use made of plot material better than anything else could. There are occasional interruptions of its progress for the purpose of pointing out when the plot scores.

The Proof of the Pudding is left to the Eater; the proof of the Plot rests with the Reader!

CHAPTER XVII

The Plot-Built Story

ARDEN—THE VILLAGE OF DESPAIR

BY

HENRY ALBERT PHILLIPS

(Published in the *Smart Set,* December, 1910)

GOD knows, if there be a question of right involved in telling the tale, no person holds that right but me; no ones' suffering and resignation has been akin to mine —except it be hers, heaven forgive her! Nor is the history more hers than mine. Certain wild nights like this bring it hovering tremblingly to my old lips—for 'twas such a night that began the drama—and dear ones once again take their places about my cold fireplace.

The appalling mystery has hung over the House of Fraling all these years, but has been sealed by ominous silence. There have been

foul rumors, I know, *hinting Black Art, and even murder,* all of which *my spoken word will dissolve,* like black clouds before the sun. Aye, one name—my own—has itched this many a year on the tongues of a generation of scandal-mongers. These I put to shame. 'Tis true, I live here, a desolate, uncommunicative man, aging rapidly and mourning a loss so sacred and profound that no spoken volumes could make it ever lie less like a corpse next my heart. Tell me—because I shut myself up with my sorrow and barred these sacred walls from curious eyes, and salved no itching ears—what then? Those, whose memory I've kept, *were my dead;* and she whom *I loved but forever lost,* she, too, is a thousand times mine—mine alone!

(The parts of the story italicized are those referred to in the parenthesized paragraphs. The first italicized words hint an obstacle; the second promise to remove it. The plot must describe a crescendo, coming back to the starting point with every promise fulfilled.)

It was *passing strange,* they say. Even so; it was that and something sadder, but no criminal matter. Judge for yourself.

She was dying; there was little doubt of it. Dr. Canby had given little hope when he left me, a few hours before, after staying nearly all the afternoon and doing all that he could. But I felt that I would be better contented if I could get the doctor to visit my mother once more. So I hastily made ready to brave the wild night and go to his house, more than a mile away in the village.

(It is a dangerous statement to make that the story is "passing strange"; while it quickens plot movement by arousing interest, it gives the writer a big order to fill. To open the story with a dying woman creates both an obstacle and suspense in the first word. Do this when you can.)

The hot sultriness that had been hovering over us was now being dissipated with terrible fury in a midsummer's storm, which was at its height as I stepped out of the doorway. The warring elements seemed but a stone's throw upward, and ready to crush the puny roof over our heads with every crash. Vivid lightning luridly pierced the murky night in startling proximity, and a deluge was sluicing every highway and byway. I found the road and sloshed along, stumbling into the swollen

gutters at every other step, often compelled to pause for direction until a flash was weirdly reflected in the dull watery sheen on every fence and tree.

Rawlinson's hounds were baying painfully as I passed, which, I could not refrain from thinking, was *an ill omen* with our simple country folk. It surely *sounded like a knell* as the notes were carried to my ear thru the heavy reeking atmosphere.

(Here are plot threads that have to be picked up later. Here is movement without action.)

After what seemed an hour of plunging thru mud and water, soaked to the skin, I reached the doctor's. Bad news awaited me, for which I did not readily forgive Canby. It seems that he was just about to plunge into the foul night himself.

"But, Canby," I cried, half angrily, "my mother is dying!"

"I know it, Andrew," he replied in full sympathy, which I little appreciated just then. "I fear my visit could do no good."

"My God, Canby! Do you mean to tell me you won't——"

"I'm sorry, Fraling, but two lives hang on my quick action during the next half hour—young Mrs. Martin and her child. But, stay; I have a substitute, Andrew, who will return with you and do as much for your dear mother as I could—until I can come to her."

He indicated a tall figure enveloped in a dark cape standing in the shadow. I glared at it, and at length discerned a *girl,* in whose face was the most *mysterious and tragic look* that I had ever seen. The long cape she wore was wet and bedraggled with mud, as tho she, too, had just come in, and she shivered as the wet garments swayed against her. Her eyes were *large and luminous.* There was something about them that from her first beseeching look, ever haunted me: it was a look of world-weariness, as tho they knew of *a secret burden that could never be shaken off* and were peering into the unknown for relief. So keen evidently was her desire to help me that she stretched forth a hand in mute appeal. As she let her arm fall, my eyes were attracted by *a heavy silk bag suspended from her wrist.*

For some reason, I could not take them from it at once; it fascinated me.

(The references to the girl followed by a hint of tragedy is a trick to heighten interest. The "bag" is a give away to the Climax and must be held in abeyance as much as possible.)

"This," continued the doctor, "is the daughter of John Trevelyan, with whom I worked side by side in the clinic for years. She is a nurse. Take her with you, Andrew, and I'll join you as soon as possible."

I nodded to the girl to follow me, and filled with terrible apprehensions over this loss of time, I strode fiercely out into the night, hoping against hope that I should find my mother alive.

The fury of the storm had abated; the rumbling thunder was less distinct, and silver-tongued lightnings played about the far edge of the horizon, where inky clouds were rapidly crowding away toward the east. A struggling moon began to silver the clearing sky, and here and there timidly appeared a blinking star. Nature's mood was changing *from despair to hope, and, strangely, so was mine.*

But I only plodded along the more quickly, the girl keeping up with the swift pace to which hope spurred me. The only sound that broke the silence was the plash of our footsteps and the resonant croakings of thousands of frogs in the meadow. They seemed to cry, "Come quick! Come quick!" And as I passed Rawlinson's kennels, I noticed that the hounds had stopped their ominous baying.

(Here a counter-crisis is introduced, which heightens interest by lowering suspense.)

Soon the two lights from mother's bedroom window were burning bright holes in the gloom. Old Nan still stood before the bed with hands clasped and eyes bent upon her mistress. I made a dash for the door, quite forgetting my companion in my eager desire to reach the room upstairs and learn the worst. When I turned at the door of the sick room I was surprised to find the girl beside me. How she reached the landing so quickly and quietly, I never knew. Her large eyes were fastened on the scene before her: the wasted woman with glowing cheeks and closed eyes, but a shadow against the snowy sheet;

the rigid form of grief-stricken black Nan. As she looked, her sympathetic face grew sharp with pain, and turning, she gave me a look that was all compassion, yet seemed to say. *"I can save her!"* She moved quickly toward the medicine table, with no sound save the dull swish of her soaked skirts.

I thanked God that she had come.

(Give a new force and impetus to the story.)

My dear mother did not die.

Her recovery seemed something of a *miracle*. But if brave, unmitigated diligence counted for anything, then she owed it entirely to Muriel.

(An important crisis that has a powerful bearing on the Climax. Referring to it as a miracle infers the supernatural, which occurs periodically, like a refrain.)

One thing, however, I noted with growing alarm as the weeks sped by; it was the *vital place the girl had come to fill* in my mother's life. She had *become* her life! Muriel would leave us occasionally, for a couple of days at a time, and just so long did mother languish. I saw that eventually this girl must be persuaded to remain with us.

(The end is delicately foreshadowed.)

As I said, on the night I first saw Muriel, the pall of some deep mystery seemed to envelop her in a cloak of sadness. It shone from the depths of her great dream-swept eyes and forbade the outsider to intrude. That was the point that troubled both mother and me: we felt that *we must ever remain outsiders.* Or, if ever we should *penetrate the veil,* the conviction was strong within us that we were destined to find Muriel no longer ours. *The girl was battling with some monster,* I could see that. Some closely-veiled sorrow was gnawing at her heart. Strangely, these signs of distress, which were especially apparent by day, were in a measure dissipated at night when she joined mother and me at the fireside. She had left us at tea *weary and sad,* but always joined us again in *buoyant spirits,* as tho she now saw before her a renewed aspect of life.

(This paragraph raises the second big obstacle. The veil must be lifted and the reader knows that it will be. What is the reason for her change of spirits? "The plot thickens.")

It was in this elevated mood that Muriel introduced *beautiful Arden* to us, and a new chapter in our lives was opened. By day we lived here on our little farm; but at night we dwelt in Arden. Yes, that Village behind the Hill became ours indeed, its inhabitants our neighbors, and Muriel's friends our friends. We would have recognized the sharp, white wooden spire of the little church anywhere, and we knew the very odors of coffee, tea and kerosene in the village store.

(This paragraph forms one of the strongest connecting links with the Climax. Arden is made an indelible reality with the reader.)

Mother and I had never heard of Arden, which was not to be wondered at, since we were not a family of travelers and had scarcely been five miles away from our little farm. It was unlikely even that many of our more itinerant neighbors in the sleepy little village knew of it, for one must go to Hinsdale by rail and drive thence to Arden, since it lies three miles beyond, just behind a rugged hill —Sugar Loaf Hill they call it. Such a sweet and pleasant hill to climb, Muriel always as-

sured us. I think I could have found the way from the Hinsdale station to the Village behind the Hill blindfolded in those days, so familiar did Muriel make each step of the way. And as for mother, she made so many inquiries about Arden that Muriel was importuned to supply infinite details. Why, mother came to know every house by the roadside; she knew which one of Sallie Purgeon's three children had its face glued to the window when *Muriel* last ascended the Trevelyan steps! I am afraid that mother, in her anxiety to show her unflagging interest in Muriel's affairs, plagued the child, judging from the strained look that came over her face as she replied to some of the questions. Mother went to such lengths as to send knick-knacks to Muriel's mother and toys to the Purgeon children, waiving aside the girl's earnest protestations. And as I saw Muriel return from Arden, *each time more haggard and careworn,* I hated and feared the Village behind the Hill, and felt that *in it lay a sinister sorrow that was at length to envelop us all.*

(Thus it will be noted that crisis-paragraphs must have a little Climax of their own. Never once tho is the Grand Crisis allowed to disappear from view.)

We sat around the great fire-place one evening, the ruddy glow sharply lighting up mother's wrinkled features and showing softly in Muriel's great eyes, as she stared and stared into the embers, as tho a great vista lay spread out before her, while her fingers worked deftly with her knitting needles. I had been smoking musingly and looking first at Muriel awhile and then at the flying sparks. Suddenly an idea had come to me—tremendous and yet so simple! It was merely *a plan to keep Muriel with us always.* Yet it seemed so big, and I was slow. Time must pass until it should become ripe enough in my mind to pluck.

(Another crisis and a seeming solution for many obstacles that lets down the tension perceptibly. The Climax is invisibly strengthened.)

At length, one afternoon—Muriel had been with us barely a month—I found her alone in the garden. As I approached her the thought of all that depended on her answer oppressed

me with a horrible dread. She, too, seemed to scent an impending crisis from my manner, and received me with mute alarm instead of her usual gentle greeting. I addressed her abruptly, tho with no little perturbation.

"Muriel—you must not leave us; you must not—it would kill mother!" This was far from what my heart was bursting to say. She looked a little relieved at once and smiled in her sad way.

"Why, Andrew Fraling, how you frightened me with such a sinister expression on your face! You made me fear that you had come to tell me—" she hesitated and her face flushed—"that I must leave—or—worse."

The declaration that I wished to make was made a greater hardship.

"Muriel," I blurted out, and something in my tone made her turn pale and shudder; "oh, Muriel, can't you see—it is *I* that want you to stay! Muriel, I want you to become my wife!"

Now it was out the words came more easily, and I stepped nearer and took her hand, and was shocked to find it *inert and cold*. "Can't

you see, child, how easily this settles the whole vexatious question? It is so simple. Mother needs you, and I, I tell you I must have you! And, you—what about you, Muriel? Let me hear you say that you, too, would be happy!" I pleaded, for I could again see that veil of mystery settling down between us. Her eyes were filled with it. Her face was blanched with pain and she stood as tho struck a violent blow. In pity and despair, I dropped her hand, hurt in not comprehending. It was fully a minute before she seemed able either to speak or to know what to say.

"Dear, dear Andrew,"—I trembled at the significant words—*"if my heart and soul were my own,* I should this moment be the happiest woman in the world! But to take things as they are—which we must, Andrew, oh, we must—your words have made me the most miserable woman."

(Here is a powerful emotional crisis coming at the moment when solution seemed at hand. The girl obviously loves him and an obstacle stands in the way. Only the Climax can remove it now.)

"Muriel!" I cried at this stab. She stepped

closer and laid her chilled hand on mine, and I looked and saw tears glistening in her eyes, which now looked so weary and impenetrable.

"No—no, Andrew, you do not, you must not, understand; the *fault* lies with me!" This with a bitterness of tone of which I had not thought her capable.

"Is it a fault, dear?" I asked reproachfully. "Or is there another—love?" It was so hard to say that word.

A look of anguish tinged with *shame*—I knew it was shame, and for a moment it stunned me—came into her face. She studied a second before she spoke.

I saw her battle with the *mysterious influence:* she closed her eyes and lifted them toward heaven as tho making a sacred appeal; suddenly, her nails dug cruelly into her pretty pale hands and she shuddered violently. I knew that the struggle was over. I waited what seemed many minutes for her to open her eyes; they sought mine, and in that fleeting moment I saw that the mystery in them was gone. I sprang toward her and had her

in my arms and had kissed her before she could struggle loose *as tho stung by a serpent.*

(Here a crisis is made when it seemed that the situation had been exhausted. Either this tension must be relieved or the Climax must come. It has been stretched to the limit.)

"Why—oh, why did you do that, Andrew?" she panted tearfully, now more than ever the woman of mystery.

I was unable to utter a word, so great was the shock I sustained at this violent repulse.

This odd encounter had made a curious disclosure, however, that both riveted my attention and aroused my compassion. I chose this awkward moment to speak of it.

"Forgive me, Muriel, of all that I have been guilty of. Only tell me that it was not my rudeness that made those dreadful bruises on your arm, dear!" Her loose sleeves had slid up to the elbows, and on both of the soft arms were many bruises, as tho made by strong fingers—or *gashed by sharp finger nails,* as my contrition and anger made it appear.

(This is a perilous experiment. It nearly knocked the bottom out of the valuable cle-

ment of final surprise that would cripple the Climax. A counter phrase was quickly brought in to throw the reader's emotions along a new line of energy.)

My simple words had thrown Muriel into even greater confusion, and she regarded me with a searching look of fear.

"No, no, Andrew; of course you did not make those marks," she said hastily.

"Then who did?" I could not restrain my jealousy and indignation.

"There, there, Andrew," she said soothingly, and there was a wan smile on her lips; "those bruises were made by hands—hands that have bruised my soul far worse, Andrew."

I thought I saw a chance to suggest her rescue, tho her tones of resignation had well nigh chilled me.

"These hands would never bruise you, Muriel, never," I protested, extending my own,—"I would have them cut off a thousand times first! Listen, Muriel. Don't give yourself to me now—but can't you take me sometime?" I pleaded tentatively.

She paused and stood for more than a minute before she said resolutely:

"Andrew Fraling, *I shall choose* between you and—and my other love—tonight. If I choose you, I shall come to you at once when I return. If I choose the other, I shall return—but never, in the name of your love for me, speak of it again."

"Very well, Muriel," I agreed resignedly.

"Andrew," she murmured, and her voice grew soft and pleading; "don't judge me too harshly. My position is a trying one, I know that, dear—and that I am to blame. Good-bye, Andrew—until tomorrow."

She went away to the village of Arden. I knew it as well as tho she had told me. She had often spoken of the hard-hearted Purgeon *young man next door.* My jealous heart that day began to wrestle with sinister thoughts.

(The tension has been relieved. The contingency of doubt enters strongly and dispels certainty. This crisis has inntroduced a new obstacle that leads straight to the Climax.)

There was no doubt of the result of Muriel's decision. It was negative.

Furthermore, a decline in the girl's health dated from that day in the garden, and with it came a gloom that wrapped all three of us

in its dark folds. When I tell you that we *never saw a bright day again*—you will know the sort of gloom I mean.

(Here is the note of inevitable tragedy that is the signal for unremitting tension from this time on. Each crisis must be more and more depressing, yet ascendant.)

As for me, my heart sank each time I saw my Muriel's pale and haggard face, which reproached me for my attempt to lift the veil.

Yet, I felt that I alone was not responsible for all this woe—I knew as well as tho she had told me, that the source of it all lay yonder in the Village behind the Hill.

The weeks that followed are those of black memories. Muriel's condition was rapidly becoming alarming, and I began to fear that the poor girl was surely becoming demented from the pressure of unseen causes. Often I heard strange mumblings in her room at night. And I could hear her bare feet pacing up and down, sometimes far into the morning. Our little home had become like a rudderless vessel, *over which hung the black, portentous clouds of some relentless storm.*

Our evening gatherings were pitiful affairs. And one phase of the appalling mystery had become more noticeable than ever. When Muriel joined us after her usual séance in her room, she seemed sustained; color returned slightly to her cheek; her hands trembled less, and her eyes were fired with a semblance of their old-time brilliancy.

Muriel's memory was failing woefully. Simple facts were interwoven with highly-colored threads of wildest fancy. It was pitiful to hear her ramble on with strange bits of conversation, but as these seemed her only pleasures, I listened in jealous and sullen silence. She spoke of some of the places she visited during her absences. Places which, I assure you, *never had existence* outside of some gifted Arabian Nights; she wove romances about the *quiet town and folk of Arden,* which I knew were too gilded for those simple people to have experienced; she mentioned simple things she had done about the house which we knew were the merest fabrications.

(This crisis, threatening the relentless storm of the Climax, must be succeeded by other crises that are not too taut, so as to break the reader's patience. The next crisis-event, and indeed all those that follow, are fraught with suggestion rather than the relation of a granted actuality. This sort of crisis is most powerful, if properly handled.)

Late one Friday night, after our usual evening by the fireside, I was so wrought upon by Muriel's strange actions and obvious misery, that I sprang up and hurried out into the dark road, hoping for a few moments of clear thought to dispel the half madness that had seized me, and give me guidance in our sore straits. I *had decided not to wait another day before taking drastic action.* This resolve calmed me somewhat, and I re-entered the house and was ascending to my bedroom, when the door of Muriel's room was thrown violently open and the girl appeared. A wrap was thrown about her head and shoulders as tho she had hastily prepared to go out of doors.

(This crisis is not only motivating of itself, but demands movement in those to follow. The reader knows that something is going to happen that will be illuminating.)

Never was there a picture to strike greater

despair in the soul of a man. Her hair was roughly disheveled; her eyes were patches of sodden dullness, which had in them the *keenest lust of unappeased hunger* that I ever saw; her lips were dry and cracked, and they moved constantly, forming *one word which I could not catch.*

(This crisis keys both interest and suspense)

"Muriel! Muriel!" I cried in the deepest anguish.

But she apparently neither heard nor saw me, and would hurriedly have passed me by, had I not seized a corner of her wrap, and so detained her. She gave vent to a little cry, more like the snarl of a beast than the erstwhile soft voice of Muriel. Then she looked me full in the face and seemed to recognize me, tho vaguely, and shuddered.

"Andrew Fraling," she said ominously, "if you want to see me kill myself before your eyes, detain me! That is all I say, detain me—or follow me?" she added as an afterthought.

I said not a word. I saw at least that she was sane, and that *no hand in God's world*

could have deterred her from her fell purpose, whatever it might be, least of all mine. Least of all mine—that was the drift of my failing senses. Then I heard her open the door, and her voice came to me as if many leagues away.

"Andrew Fraling, *may you and God forgive me!*"

(Tension can scarcely be drawn tighter, so that the next crisis must move towards revelation. Still the relation of the latest crisis is bound by no more intimate tie to the Climax than the very first.)

She did not return, altho I waited thru the whole long night.

In the morning mother found me where Muriel, on her way out, had left me. She gave a little startled cry as she looked into my face. The night's drama must have eaten its way into my features and left its acid mark.

"Where is she?" she queried with a tremulousness that foreshadowed her fragile strength.

"Gone, mother. Gone into the night from where I got her."

"Andrew," she whispered huskily, "you must find her—you must!"

And I saw that she spoke truly for herself. If I failed, the look of doom I saw in my poor mother's eyes was certain of fulfillment.

I had but one place in mind, of course, in which to pursue a search—that was the village of Arden.

I found that there was no train for Hinsdale for three hours, so I willingly trudged six miles to the junction, where I could get one an hour sooner.

From Hinsdale every foot of the way was as familiar to me as the paths about our own little farm. Yet I hesitated in my purpose, as a sudden strong aversion came over me against lifting the veil to the Village behind the Hill, for I knew in my inmost soul that *there I should expose the pitiful skeleton* that dangled in Muriel's closet.

(This crisis combines movement and action towards rapid Climax.)

But in the very next moment I hesitated no longer, for on looking down I saw the *imprints of a woman's shoe* freshly made in the dew-sprinkled dust of the path and leading straight to Cradle Rock!

(By enumeration of crises many in number, yet revealing specific steps, the movement just previous to the Climax is retarded, in order to strengthen the situation thru cumulative effect.)

Refreshed by this hopeful sign, I sprang into a half trot, and could not refrain from an exclamation of pleasure, when I saw but a few rods ahead, the great white rock, shaped like a rough-hewn cradle, now dazzling in the morning sunlight. I began at once to clamber up it, and near the summit found a place quite smooth, as tho worn so by human occupancy. I had no doubt that this was the spot where Muriel told us she often came and sat. To one side of the smooth place I found a deep cleft, which was cluttered with rubbish. I went closer, and involuntarily tears sprang to my eyes, as I saw lying there *the various trifles my kind old mother had sent by Muriel:* there were all the tidbits for the Purgeon children—bright-colored toys, now washed pale by many rains—and other tokens of kindness, equally decayed.

(This is the first revealing crisis, purposely preceding the Climax so that the surprise

will be gentle and not give the reader a wrench. Fine Art may astound the devotee, but it should never startle him.)

I paused a few seconds, sorrowfully perplexed. Then with wildly beating heart, I *turned to take my first view* of that dreaded village beyond.

That which met my eager eyes made me gasp from sheer amazement, as tho I were in the clutch of an impossible dream. Then hot anger shot thru me.

Dazedly I closed my eyes to test their truth of vision. But when I opened them and looked again the prospect was the same.

(In these final crises, try to imitate nature, by reproducing the lull that precedes the burst of the storm. Then no one is shocked, for every one had expected it to break; they are made suddenly to feel the dynamic descent of Nature.)

Peaceful meadows nourished by a silvery stream lay outspread; a herd of cows grazed in the foreground, with here and there a straggling clump of trees blurring the landscape—this was all that one could see for ten miles —except a horizon broken by endless hills. There was not a man-made thing in sight—there never had been!

The village of Arden never was!

(If this tremendous crisis had directly included the chief figure, it must then have been the Climax. There is but one thing left in such a contingency, that is to produce an even more tremendous crisis in which every unit culminates—the Climax.)

Arden had become more than ever our Village of Despair—always hers, now ours as well.

I put my hand to my eyes and mechanically scanned the scene, with some hope of seeing the beloved figure, which just then I would have pursued a thousand miles. Discouraged, I looked about the rock again and saw a fragment of black hanging on a jagged edge. It was Muriel's silk bag, which I had never seen off her wrist.

My first thought was that it contained a message for me that would explain everything. With a feeling of dread of further revelations, I paused, before I thrust my hand into its depths. My trembling fingers came in contact with a cylinder of cold metal, together with a number of little vials. At length I drew one of them out. It bore a red label

with the name of a Hinsdale druggist—below the name was a skull and cross-bones, and below that—God pity her and forgive her! I gave a sob of compassion and of a love that will go with me to the grave. It was indeed her message. I saw that she had done this that I might never seek her more—it could only be monstrous for both of us. How gruesomely the marks on her arm explained themselves in that cold cylinder! For those vials all bore the single sinister legend—*morphine!*

(There is the Climax, Denouement, Conclusion.)

One's first view of a selected prospect or subject mainly is fraught with pleasure and surprise; a review generally is necessary if one expects to derive knowledge and understanding.

CHAPTER XVIII

Recapitulation and Review

A SYLLABUS DESIGNED FOR THE USE OF TEACHERS AND STUDENTS IN THE STUDY OF THE PLOT OF THE SHORT STORY; 207 VITAL QUESTIONS TAKEN FROM THE TEXT ITSELF AND COVERING THE WHOLE SUBJECT.

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Date Loaned			
DEC 16 1940		Dr Cop	
JUL 11 1945			
OCT 11 1956		Ann Davenport	
MAY 23 1963		E. Scott	
JAN 18 1967		Ahlen	
SEP 24 1973		Larry McKay	
NOV 21 1989			

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14664

Phillips, Henry A.
The plot of the short story.